

SOUTHERLY



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by Elizabeth Roberts

Notes and Comments

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"RICKETTY KATE"

(*Mrs. A. J. Filson*)

[See page 171]

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R. G. HOWARTH

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Some National Tendencies in Australian Poetry By MAX DUNN

Readers of poetry will agree that certain elements distinguish the poetry of one English-speaking country from that of another. After forty years of consistent reading and study of British, American, and foreign poetry (mostly in the original tongues), as well as reading in the past twenty-five years of more than 3000 books and booklets listed as Australian poetry, I am convinced that the poetry of all peoples has certain characteristics which may be termed national. English poetry, for example, has a marked tendency to exuberance of imagery, French to observation and subtilization of thought and feeling, and German to intensity of feeling and a preference for the song-form. Moreover, English poetry is generally more elaborate and artificial than English prose, whereas German poetry is generally more simple and direct than German prose, which is the recognized instrument for the transmission of complex thought.

Certain tendencies are also apparent in the poetry of other peoples. Polish poetry exploits the distinctive linguistic characteristics of that language, yet has a scantiness of imagery, as exemplified in the work of that virtuoso of the Polish language, Julian Tuvin, considered by Polish critics to be the greatest living poet in Poland today. Spanish poetry has two opposing elements—a passionate simplicity, often with a devotional tone, and a predilection for conceits different in conception from those favored by Donne and other English metaphysical poets. The element of passionate simplicity in Spanish poetry, which I believe owes much to the influence of the poet-mystic St John of the Cross, also runs through the poetry of the Latin American republics, and is noticeable in the work of Gabriela Mistral, the distinguished contemporary poet of Chile and a Nobel Prize winner. The other element, use of conceits, which goes back as far as Gongora, may be seen in the work of another Chilean, Pablo Neruda, considered the most important contemporary poet of Latin America. Both elements are blended in Lorca, for though his use of conceits is usually ascribed to the influence of the French symbolists and Surrealism, I think that the native influence of Gongora cannot be disregarded. Mexican poetry, whatever the school, has a melancholy, a moodiness, but its proclivity to extravagances of

too-personal expression is generally corrected by a fine self-consciousness. Italian poetry is marked by a tendency to a metaphysics of love, a trend towards political awareness, and a readiness to revolt against excessive spirituality and academicism. Yiddish poetry expresses a brooding reflection, mostly in a lyrical strain and in a folk-mood, with a strong didacticism. I have cited these examples at random, but anyone who cares to study the poetry of the various peoples will find evidence of distinctive national tendencies, if, in addition to detachment, he has a sensitivity to the language and the spirit of a people.

In approaching Australian poetry, however, we are faced with the problem of getting outside our own skin to look upon our literature in the way we look upon the literatures of other peoples. This is particularly harder for Australians than for others, because we have been so isolated from other nations and so satisfied with our own way of thinking that we are not always able to see how we differ from them, or if we can see any differences we consider our own way to be better. Hence, the local practice is elevated to an absolute standard of value.

Furthermore, literary analysis, like self-analysis and self-criticism, is undeveloped in Australia. Most of our self-appointed "critics" expect other people's work to be like their own—a form of literary Narcissicism—or they boost the work of a particular clique and tend to be pleasantly non-committal, politely patronizing, or Job-like about the work of writers who may have a following, be useful, or be critics themselves. If a writer prefers to stand on his own legs, he is usually tagged with the damning epithet of "clever". Cliques, of course, are not peculiar to Australia, but in other countries critics usually show more craft knowledge. Writers in Australia, too, are abnormally touchy about criticism of their work, even if a critic's comments contain valuable suggestions or craft hints, which admittedly is seldom the case. Indeed, the critic here is like a doctor who says that the patient has something wrong with him, but who never seems to know or to want to tell what is wrong and never prescribes treatment to make the patient better. Other critics go to extremes by declaring, without a thorough examination, that so-and-so is not only in the best of health, but is also the most perfect specimen of a poet. Usually the lines quoted to support such statements show that the patient needs urgent attention and that the physician himself should not be on the register.

It is time we stopped trying to persuade ourselves and others that Australian poetry, on the whole, is up to world standard. The value of most work has been inflated either by an understandable desire for

national prestige or by the persistent blowing by friends of the author. Most harmful to writers and to the progress of literature is the provincialism of many critics, whereby they give the impression that the products of their own State are the only ones in Australia. We should start looking with grown-up eyes at our literature, for we are not likely to have a first-rate literature until we have first-rate criticism and critics whose comments show that they know what they are talking about and whose claim to be considered judges is not controverted by their advocacy of poor work written by a friend or by a critic who must be propitiated. Since I have not learnt how to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare, but have gone my own way without the usual chauvinism and the worship of names, I feel that I can discuss with some detachment certain tendencies in Australian poetry which may be called "national" rather than "personal", because most Australian writers exhibit them. First of all, readers familiar with British and American poetry (not to mention French) must have noticed that the poetry of statement is more common in Australian literature than the poetry of suggestion. Indeed, most of our writers tend to be over-explicit. Is this dominance of statement attributable to the common Australian directness in speech, to a lack of sensitivity or subtlety, or to writing down to an imaginary public? There is, of course, a place for the poetry of statement, and some fine poetry of that kind has been written, but in literature as in life the hint is often more effective than direct speech. After all, most of the greatest modern poetry, such as that by Yeats and Valéry, suggests rather than states.

Apart from the preference for statement, there are four marked elements in Australian poetry, which may be described as the dry, the sentimental, the reportorial, and the oratorical. The dry is usually associated with satire, intellectualism, and able craftsmanship, but with thinness of feeling and sparseness of imagery; the sentimental, with a lyrical strain and conventional versification; the reportorial, with observation, but little or no vision, though sometimes with fine craftsmanship and a sense of imagery; the oratorical, with prosy or affected diction, and generally with looseness of structure and an enthusiasm for some Cause, such as nationalism or a political party. With the exception of Brennan, there is little profundity in most work, for Australian poets seem to be afraid of being thought difficult or erudite. Indeed, the general tone tends to be rationalistic, without a world view, though witty and clever comments on society abound. Moreover, with the exception of Neilson and a few others, there is little sustained and

original lyrical invention. Strangely enough, the dry writers when they try to express sentiment often fall into sentimentality or artificiality near to "preciousness". Another element which may be called the archaic, because of its fondness for backgrounds, subjects, and diction of another age, appeared among several writers until the thirties, but there have never been enough writers with this element in their work to justify calling it a national tendency. Instances of a diction belonging to another period, however, still appear in the works of many writers. During recent years distinctive Australian expressions and speech-rhythms have begun to appear in poetry more frequently, but few writers have exploited these speech rhythms, probably because Australians are not aware of the differences between their speech rhythms and those of Britons and Americans. Much Australian work, like contemporary English and American poetry, gives the impression that the writer is assuming an attitude rather than expressing a feeling he has experienced, as though he is not involved in the poem, but is talking about something experienced by someone else. Indeed, the reader often feels that the writer is striving to be poetic, as if poetry can be considered a career or a hobby open to anyone instead of a condition.

As R. G. Howarth points out in his excellent booklet *Notes on Modern Poetic Technique*, there is also, with a few exceptions, a tendency to conventional forms and conservatism in Australian poetry. We might even go further and say that Australians tend to be conformists in both life and literature. Not only do most of them tend to see everything through somebody else's eyes, but they also tend to follow the style of each other and to use the same themes. Hence perception is second-hand, and there is an insensitivity to the best from overseas, and, what is more harmful to the writer, an insensitivity to our own time, our own place, and our own people. This insensitivity is partly due to inbreeding in the arts, partly to lack of self-criticism, partly to a national over-emphasis on extroversion, and partly to a national propensity to lowbrowism—a relic of the cult of the larrikin.

There is also a marked tendency to imitation not only in the people but also in the writers of this country, which has more bird mimics than any other continent. Even when a writer uses something learnt from the practice of oversea poets, it is an obvious imitation of the outer form rather than a clear perception of the spirit of the original, a borrowing rather than transmutation.

Perhaps mention should be made of the growing use of images drawn from the Australian scene and of historical incidents and char-

acters as themes. This is for the good, but such things are the common properties of the poetry of all peoples, the raw material of the poet, not the universal element that makes a real poem. The use of Australian particulars alone does not make a poem, for particulars are the means by which a poet expresses the universal. The healthiest tendency is the appearance in poems of critical comments on the Australian people. When such self-criticism becomes more general among writers it will be a sign that we have reached manhood and nationhood.

The Dead

A FRENCH CEMETERY

The way they go when they are dead
Leads not to heaven but a bed
Where under leaves and flowers of beads
A concrete couch meets all their needs.

Each grave's a garden of open flowers
To mock the body's decaying hours,
For the worm that gnaws its way to bone
Will find these roses made of stone.

One sepulchre lies wide and clear——
Perhaps a wise ghost gone from here,
Gone where two birds, glazed blue for joy,
Look from the bosom of a little boy.

The only dignity in all these graves
Lies around those whom no one saves,
Enemies hid by the same weed,
Helmets or crescents all they need.

In the sun the silver letters glare
Messages 'A mon fils' or 'Père',
Stamped in aluminium,
Untarnishable till Kingdom Come.

The olives shining on the silver hill
Shiver like ghosts who may not lie still,
Watching from each windy leaf
The sum of piety and grief.

GEOFFREY DUTTON

Kookaburra*

A Symphony of Laughter

First Movement: Allegro

by T. INGLIS MOORE

Over the multiple terrors of Mars
 Laughter of man goes up to the stars
 From the flesh, the mind, and the spirit, bright
 As the trail of Leonids scoring the night:
 Dower of life to bless as the rain,
 Challenge to sorrow, mask for pain;
 The old undaunted assurance of man
 Hurling defiance, since time began,
 At ice and fire and diluvian seas,
 Shadows of dark infinities,
 And the clayed doom of death's decrees.

Strangest, most runic, of laughers heard
 Comes the laugh of the symbolling bird,
 The Kookaburra, who voices at eve
 Irony's jeer then turns to retrieve
 Outburst of wild, daemonic scorn
 By roulade of gusto he rolls in the morn:
 When Ahriman has given voice
 To darkness, then Ormuzd shall rejoice
 Where Eternal Nay and Yea are blent
 In one queer maker of merriment
 At the sun's cold fall and his burning ascent.

Ooh! Wah-ha-ha! Koo-koo-hah-hah-heh-heh!

Wavelets of laughter vanish, drowned in immense
 Surge of the Kookaburra's mighty mirth
 With spume of echoes filling the gully, whence
 Laughter returns, reborn in hollow birth.

It is the strange sound that is not song and knows
 No semblance in horns or woods or sorrowing strings.
 Unknown to all the older worlds, it flows
 In Australia only, here, where the reckonings
 Were made anew, for incredulous captains to chart
 Incredible coasts under the Southern Cross,
 To discover lands like wyverns, grotesque, apart,
 And turn into gamblers, staking their lives on a toss.

* Awarded first prize in the Verse Section of the *Sydney Morning Herald* Literary Competitions, 1948-9 (as "Jackass and Imp", now revised and printed in a slightly abbreviated form). The competitions are held under the terms of a grant of £30,000 set aside by the proprietors of the *Herald* for the encouragement of Australian literature and art.

Australia still is the fabulous land, colossal,
Weird with the branched bones of skeleton trees
In the moonlight, freaked with the platypus cheating the fossil,
With the pocketed kangaroo vaulting with ease
Over all fences, with brogla and curled koala
And the bower-bird waltzing alone in his leafy parlour.
She is still the Terra Incognita, grown
Beyond guess but not to knowledge, herself made wise
With a million summers, holder of secrets, alone
Amongst lands, calling for understanding eyes.

Not with the forms of England must she be sung,
But with native amalgam far from the pumiced phrase,
With language broad as her spaces, a crossbred tongue
Where the old lore mingles with earth and life's new ways,
Where the sun's delight is strangely crossed with despair,
And the soft blue haze is blent with the arid glare.

She is the last homeland of Pan, goat-god
Of the earth, lord of our flocks, whose pipings play
The dual music, ruling his beasts by the rod
Of fear as he sends their claws and fangs to pay
The dues of death to his last offender, knowing
No pity, cruel as the drought, followed by train
Of imps and daemons of mischief and malice, yet blowing
Melodies honey-sweet in his piercing strain
With notes that still resound with the sun-fired mirth—
Caught by the Kookaburra—from springtides of earth.

She is the fit home for the bird-sound
That is laughter, not music, the revelation found
Of the Imp of Irony told in the eve by the bird
Spilling the ultimate jape of the cosmic absurd,
Or skirling his turbulent salvoes of morning joy,
Chiacking the sun with a cackled *Ahoj!*
He is the double rune ripe for unravelling
Here where symbols are mates to companion our travelling,
Where mysteries dance in corroborees yet unknown
As present and past in a lap-stone's cirque are shown:—

Hold in your hand this rounded stone
I found in the Wollondilly shallows,
Since this is more than pebble grown
Worn by the bowing of flowing cellos,
For still it thrills the inward ear
With strains like Dvorak's, deep and clear.

No autumn yellowed its bar of red
 Forged long ago by burning hammers
 Before the blood of Christ was shed,
 Before Cro-Magnons told their summers:
 Aeons of ice and flame I see
 Packed here in earth's epitome.

Far incantations it can cast
 To summon the forces of man's wild story—
 The pain of his climb from his stone-age past;
 Courage from David's sling; the starry
 Pride of Valhalla; and the spell that falls
 From the horn that echoed on Elfland walls.

Stone and water, air and fire
 Everywhere hold delphic meaning;
 Their symbols wait on our desire,
 Lodes of gold that call for our mining,
 For Silurist eyes the grass can bless
 With shoots of everlastingness.

We are the blind who move unstirred
 By the waratah's candelabra of wonder;
 The wattle's golden bough has no word
 For its logos of life; and stray myths wander
 Lost in the Bush, wailing forlorn,
 Spirits unfleshed that cry to be born.

Now open the imaged eyes of the mind!
 Riding the ranges, now master the brumbies
 Of unbroken emblems; though we find
 Them wilder than delicate Bambis
 Of the old world, they shall still be ours,
 Bridled to bear our dreams and powers.

Ours, too, the twy-formed shape
 The mythos takes, since the Kookaburra's
 Laughter is not alone escape
 Of irony's scorn but also mirrors
 Life's zest, the gusto rich and broad
 In the giant guffaw that Rabelais roared.

This dual laughter, Janus-faced,
 Captures two ways, catching the dapple
 Of earth, its shadow and shine enlaced,

Both night and morning that cross and couple
In changing skies. Yet irony first
Resounds in the harsh, daemonic burst

Kook-kook-ka-ka! Ka-ka-kahoo-ha-ha-ha!

Second Movement: Largo
Evening is the time of the long shadows, lapping
About us, slanting from homestead or tree,
Slinking within us, till I am a dark confusion
Of shadows—a harlequin pied with selves forgotten,
With no clear, indubitable Me.

This is the hour when the blue hills and the paddock
Hold their breath by the day's bed
Of passing, for the panorama of gold is over,
The scarlet gone from the stratus, and the ranges sharpen
Their rims when the sun is dead.

Before the arms of the bloodwoods receive the body
Or the morepork mourns from the creek, bird
Upon bird cries valediction, but the Kookaburra
Mocks from the ironbark at the pomp of evening,
Holding such obsequies absurd.

He reminds us there's always a darkness about us, within us,
Deeper than the swung plummet of light—
A secret gully unflecked by the long white fingers
Of the nomad moon, a bay unprobed by the ferries
Of topaz slicing the Harbour night.

Five steps from the lighted room and I am eyeless,
Blind in the shadowless night where the trees
Of the bush are not even ghosts, but are one in the blackness
With the earth and the sky. There is only the old terror
At clutch of the lurking mysteries.

The slow aeonian winds blow on the coldness
Of the grave, where death's last hieroglyph
Baffles the sense. We go to the last great darkness
Where no sun rises, and no horizons
Are scanned from the skull's eyeless cliff.

We move in an inward darkness. Not suns, but comets,
The worlds of the wandering lovers gleam
For a moment, then fade in the self's unknowable ether
To the limbo of mind where every spirit travels
Alone, down gulfs of endragoned dream.

What of the darkness where wave upon wave of furies
 Bomb our bodies with explosions of pain
 That tear with pitiless talons? What of the cancers
 Eating the cells of our faith, while the gangrened anguish
 Rots to despair that cries in vain?

Terrors of night and the bare self and the torture
 Of pain are paler yet than the black
 Of evil, the cruelties of sadists, exploiters, and tyrants—
 Avatars of the apet! O what horrors follow
 Devil-man on his reddened track!

Now praise the crocodile! Think highly of dingo,
 Death-adder or shark—or all savage beasts
 Preying from hunger, kinder than men whose murder
 Feeds on the flesh and heart and lives of their fellows,
 Unsated in long Atrean feasts.

History shows as the highways of blood, pathways
 Of misery, crooked trails of slime,
 Zigzags of our endless follies, veerings of drunken
 Lusts, and the desolate emptiness mocked by the moaning
 Of cold, macabre winds of time.

K'hoo-koo-kaw! Kaw-kaw-kaw-ka!

Where are the Baalbeks now, the splendid, the strong?
 The columns are broken, and the temple bones are jutting
 Awry from the charnel sand. Not even a song
 Remembers the lords and ladies who once went strutting
 In their proud graces, now one with the emperors blown
 Over the dusty horizon, all gone with the cry
 Of the chained slaves into night of the homeless, unknown
 Yesterdays, their laughters, desires, and tears
 Thrown doomwards by hands of the adamantine years,
 Lost like the vanished tribes whose totem grounds
 Are tolled by the morepork's ghostly sounds.

The brief cicadas of a summer's day, we shrill
 Insistent for our noon, with clamour unheeded, to fill
 Our insect turn in the farce where irony shapes
 The pitiful drollery led by unessenced apes.

Kooka-wahoo-wahah-hah-hah-heh-heh!

Witch-like, the Kookaburra's cacklings show
 Relish for such a jest. He jeers at the sun,
 Knowing this lord of earth is only one

Of a countless herd of unmustered stars that go
Galloping over the paddocks of windy space,
And earth itself a chancy pinpoint pricked
Once like a meaningless mote of dust on the face
Of that fenceless void where Asias, Americas—all
Continents—are lost in an ocean beyond the plane
Of our finite thought; as the flesh ends with the pall
Of death, the mind is engulfed in the numbing Inane.

Even our earth, half-known, has no sure laws
Nor moves, as Planck discerned, on orbit of cause
Plastic to calculus—rather each charted advance
Is probable only, tacking at gust of chance.
Unfathered, unmothered, life came from darkness, a joke
Anonymous. It grew as a clay kneaded by stroke
Of ice and slap of fire, fashioned by time
To thousands of antic shapes. From the first slime
It flapped to cursive jellies before our souls
Had housed themselves in flesh, or spidery mind
Had crept into webbed cells to exude in rhyme.
It shambled in dropsical dinosaurs till ice
Boxed the leviathan bones as relentless price
Of change. So life sloughed skins and vanished, designed
Preposterous, wasted with terrible humour, thrown
Helter-skelter to havoc, leaving a bone
Or random rock-print as relic of bird and beast
Who munched each other's flesh in the cannibal feast
Of nature, slobbering blood for creation's advance.

Then a rash ape gambled at last on a tall chance,
Called heads instead of habitual tails, and won
To turn Neanderthal, Mongol, and Hun,
Progressing from Plato to reach the radiant goal
Of a Hitler, apex of man's harmonious soul,
Till civilization, completing her centuried tramp,
Scaled her Everest here in Belsen Camp
And Nippon's design of death on the Thailand Line.
In the latest of global wars with bloodier Sommes,
Speedier tanks, and better, atomic bombs.
She ascended from Bach to boogie-woogie, too,
And rose to the wistful grace of Woolloomooloo.
Near and far, from every S.P. bar,
We attain at last to the Beautiful, Good, and True.
Wahoo-wa-hoo!
Hah-hah-ha!

The farce turns tragic, the laughter harsh,
Revealing Irony's Imp, that stands
As the light that betrays from the evening marsh,
The power that jerks our puppet hands.

O Imp of Irony, shadow behind the eyes
Of hope, destroyer of dreams, dooming
Our pride to belittled confusion,
You are the prince of mosquitoes, the father of flies,
Eternal mocker, who makes the foaming
Desire leave gullied erosion.

Bedevilling our birth, you made it a crazy joke,
A random meeting of sperms in mating—
What could be madder or wilder?
Moving from chaos to chaos, you broke
Heart or temper by spiteful aborting,
The Loki who murdered our Baldur.

Yours is the grim touch that turns
The white, uplifted breasts that lovers
Once kissed, trembling, into flapping
Brown dugs on the bony skin—so the lover learns
That the crow of carrion time still hovers
Over beauty for certain supping.

What is life but a worm-cast scribbled on sand, at most
A half-caught whisper, a broken segment,
A raggle-taggle journey
To Nowhere, a punting on horses pipped at the post,
And kissing, not lips, but only the fragment
Chipped from our castles of blarney?

Man is the ape with the tiger caged in his brain.
And your laughter chills as you loose the tiger
To claw at our minds and burrow
Into savaged and bleeding flesh, till we go insane.
Our story is always a terrible saga
Of strife, oppression, and sorrow.

Daemon of Irony, you are the dark night
Of the soul, when it wanders lonely and heartless
Through the abyss unending
Where there is no comfort, or goal, or light—
Only the blank of being, worthless,
And no faith for the spirit's landing.

Third Movement: Scherzo

Now, from the derelict fears that cry in our gloom,
Out of the terrors that grope through anarchic night,
When Venus, cold and ambiguous, pales to her doom
The Kookaburra comes with the circling light.

Buffeting cares, the roaring surf of his laughters
Breaks and curls on the lemon shores of morning
And shakes the leafy rafters of kurrajongs
With the brazen gongs of his scorning.
Blithely he shatters the stillness of crystal airs
And batters the clenched knuckles of our time's despairs
With the zest of his chuckles. Out of the deep sea
Of his mirth he even dares
To assault, with gusts of ruffian glee,
The Bardolphian sun as he reels from the bar
Of the east to climb his cloudy stairs.

Ooh-wah-ha-ha! Koo-kah-hah-hah-hah!

Roars of the Laughing Jackass resound
Over the madrigals tinkling around,
Where every bird tells
Delight that swells
From the bush and tree and glittering ground—
Twitter of chittering diamond-sparrows;
Screech of the clamorous cockatoos
As they sweep in a flock to cruise
Over the corn-paddock furrows;
Piping of honey-eaters, clinging
To the jacaranda's purple bells
To set
Them swinging,
Ringing,
And chiming;
Cry of the pee-wee, sharp as regret;
And the roundel rhyming
Hey-nonny-nonny!
Of the trim and bonny
Blue-bonnet wren by the lane,
With a *hey-nonny-nonny!*
Again and again
In praise of the morn
From the billowing white
Of the blossoming thorn;
While the magpies atop of the she-oak unfold
Carol on carol of bubbling gold

Caught from the honied spilth of the sun
 And loosed in rapids of song that run
 Down gorges of morning in eddying flight:
 All the chattering
 Bright
 With joy's refrain,
 Pitter-pattering
 Light
 As drops of rain;
 All the charms and all the spells
 Chanted by the flying choirs
 In a hundred criss-crossed patterns;
 All the melody that wells
 From the little lutanists of dawn,
 Flautists on flower and tree and lawn,
 Chirpers in silks and satins,
 Trillers of ageless matins
 Hymning the sun from their leafy pews,
 Topmost twig, or greeneries dense
 With notes as clear as the dews
 Beading the rosared wires
 Of the homestead fence.

Kook-kook-kwoka-aha! Haha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Now are the runnels of bird-songs lost in the sound
 Of the Kookaburra's laughters immense
 Cascading down the creek, till echoes rebound
 From its lichenized walls of rock unseen.
 Ho for the sun-saluter! The herald with blast
 Of trumpeting gusto, strong as the typhoon
 That tosses the spiring mast
 Dipping from orange mountains of the moon
 To untiring green of the sea's ravine.

Ha! Here is a jubilate cast
 On the dance of the sun-sequined leaves
 Of the box and the apple-gum—
 A mighty voice that achieves
 Fit expression of this our land,
 Seeking to make us understand
 Feelings unspoken and thoughts yet dumb.
 For here is a bold aubade in the bass
 That drowns the tenor notes that come
 From the English lark, and puts to turbulent scorn
 The maudlin nightingale forlorn
 With her threnody of storied grace,

Lamenting the hour that she was born
To reddens her breast on the rowel of the thorn.
On her curved conch, from the blue Aegean seas,
The wave-white goddess rose, dazzling, but here
In the Bush a thousand Anadyomenes
Of beauties untold entrance the eye and ear,
Rising everywhere, far from the hollow men,
From the bitches gone in the teeth, from worlds that expire
Whimpering, with carburettors choked again.
Here is a broad land where hope and desire
Still hold to their heyday, and capricorn youth, care-free,
Rides whistling or plunges with shout into carnival sea.
Here is the laughter sired by the chestnut sun
When, burning with ardour, he mounted the azure mare
Of the sky, and she threw his filly of wonder to run
Warrigal-wild on the plains of the ambered air.
Here is the lustiness peremptory, vast, when the spring
Churns the sap into buds, and the wattle first
Is a tumult of gold, and the melaleucas fling
Honey and snow on the hill, and banners burst
Into fire of phoenix leaves from the blackened trees,
And earth vibrates with prodigal ecstasies.

Here is the laughter primeval, strong
And swift as the southerly buster that pounds
The Heads with the spray's white pestles, hounds
Sydney's languor of noon to flight,
And leaps to the inland, speeding along
To rouse the pondering billabong,
Hurdling the crest of the guardian height
And the gorges where cragged Blue Mountains hold
Earth's writhings gorgonized, fold upon fold.

K'hoo! K'ha! Wahoo-wah-ha-ha-ha!

Now turn from the menace of rancours, distortion of fears,
And the cold wars. Unbuckle the bandoliers.
Now break the shackles of hate, throw to the wind
Handcuffs of greed that keep the spirit pinned
To the dry ledger, stride out of the world's gaol
Where the keys jangle and the wardens of strife prevail,
And take your ancient heritage of man
As a freeman of earth, a son of almighty Pan.
Now gallop out from time to infinity
On the green Phar Laps that race on the sea,
The sea that journeys here from the blizzard's mouth,
From the silence of ice from the dazzling doors of the South.

Join with creation here in magnificent joy!
 Now take the Southern Cross from the sky as a toy
 For your children to play with, swing on the canting belt
 Of Orion holding askew his lion's pelt
 In these topsy-turvy, rebellious Antipodes,
 And leap debonair from the swinging starry trapeze
 Over Canopus to splash in the Milky Way,
 Riding the surf of its breakers through flying spray
 Of the nebulae, beaching at last on the yellow sands
 Curved on the shore of the moon, meeting demands
 Of cosmic delight, joining exultant mirth
 Loosed by the Laughing Jackass over the earth
 In laughters breaking the back of the snake despair
 As he rollicks with gladness matching the morning air,
 Drunk with the glory of life, roaring with torrent of glee
 Cataracting in splendour from land to the answering sea.

Fourth Movement: Andante

Noon in the creek, with the drowsy, hot gold
 Of the sun calyxed in stillness by ochred walls,
 Enfolded by the firm, unfading corolla of rocks,
 And the delicate topmost plumes of the casuarinas
 Patterned in filigrees of olive, set
 Against the bared breast of the sapphire sky.
 The air is rich with the smell of caves, loam,
 And the honeyed scent of the rock-lily pale in its cranny.
 The grey goanna sleeps on the rock; the hush
 Lies like a deep pool of warm content,
 Till over it sweeps the locusts' bronzen zooming
 As the Yellow Mondays from out of the myrtle turn
 The summer to sound, the heat to plangent music.
 Then comes again the Kookaburra's laughter,
 Subdued to the creek's silence, phrased for the noon.

K'hoo-kook-kaw-kaw!

Noon is the zenith hour, the sun's suspension,
 The equinoctial point where the last breath
 Of morning invokes the first sigh of the night,
 Conjunction of present and future meeting, shaking
 Hands in the clasp of a timeless understanding.
 This is the poised hour of the synthesis needed,
 The magpie moment blending the black and the white,
 The instant when Manichean evil and good,
 Contending death and life, the truceless campaigning
 Of night and morning, irony's drought and the rainfall

SOUTHERLY

Of gusto—all conflicts, all, are resolved,
With the hard balance of opposites struck in the end,
Destruction shown as the inescapable black,
Creation the blaze redemptive, in chiaroscuro
Patterned to integrate the picture complete.

This is the fourth movement, now resolving
Concord and dissonance, largo and scherzo, rounding
The form to wholeness, setting action and thought
To harmonize with time, the vision of man
With the two-fold spirit possessing this, our land,
United in laughter loosed by the Laughing Bird.

First come the familiar, dominant two,
Death the denier, life the irrepressible affirmer,
Battling with worms and buds, pitting the armies
Of ulcers against the brigaded hormones,
Crimping autumnal leaves or ordering the echelons
Of jonquil spears to advance from their ambush,
While the bayonet clashes with the grass,
Blade upon blade, continuously:

When battle's noise was gone,
Strange dialogue I heard:
The bayonet, flung upon
The grass, took up the word.

"I tear the flesh apart!"
The boasting bayonet said,
"With steel I pierce the heart,
White into living red!"

The blade of grass cried, "No!
Red turns to growing green
When blood you spilt shall flow
To feed my roots unseen."

"O keen and sure and strong,
I am the blade of death.
I make an end of song,
Desire and hope and breath."

"Symbol of life am I,
Of birth and primal food;
I nourish when I die,
Like Christ upon the rood."

"Man is the master of fate,
Chaining the land and the sea,

And his burning anger and hate
Are forged to a point in me."

"Still shall the proud man be laid
Beneath me in the end,
At peace below my blade,
His conqueror—and friend!"

Kook-wah-ha! Ha-ha-ha! Kook-kook-koo-ka!

Again, from the stringybark by the creek's bend,
The Kookaburra's syllables fall, rend
The hush, quiver in sunlight, and stir the shade,
Till all my fears of the night dwindle and fade
Away, for the scorn of Irony's Imp is shown
Ironic boomerang, foolishly thrown
To strike the thrower, since I learn
To laugh at mockery itself, so spurn
Defeat, and make his laughter grow.
The tragic katharsis purging my woe.
If the jest of the Imp is a bitter joke,
We can wear it still on our back as a cloak.
Where weakness is known, then strength is won,
As the womb of darkness conceives the sun.
If evil crammed all the human page
It would turn to blank, for only the gauge
Of good can give it meaning, as death
Only has being because of the breath
Of life that it stills, and our dual life
Knows bliss of content through bane of strife.
Delight and sorrow walk hand in hand
With neither one in sole command,
But he who bore the weight of grief
Best measures the joy as light as a leaf;
Whitest the almond blossom blows
For the man who the Imp's black malice knows.

Go forward as life's triumphal master
With eyes on death as our sure disaster,
Scorning the tick of our clocked days
When the aeons flash to value in blaze
Of the lightning joy, the resolute mind,
The epic phrase the poet designed
For Beowulf slaying the nicors at night
With gallantries ageless, the rose of white
Rewarding the mystic, all perduring thought,
And the loveliness our love has wrought
Flying in ecstasy beyond

Belt and bar of irony's bond.
Creation is still the resilient power
Conquering Imp and cynic hour
And the clawed fear from the haunted shade.

See the blood of the crazed victim
Red on Shiva's blade!
Yet brighter the lotus glow of Brahma,
Maker and made.

This is the day of the cloudy Destroyer,
His dusk of explosive death;
But life is reborn by the calm Creator's
Triumphant breath.

Where man, in a world disintegrating,
Scatters, breaks, and divides,
Earth with the sun and the wind and Orion
In oneness abides.

The storm of our age's agony stripped us
Of the rank growths of ease,
Till we saw the unchangeable contours of naked
Simplicities:—

Pulsing of life as the proud rhythm,
Death answered by birth's riposte,
And fortitude, clear-eyed, replacing
The faiths we lost;

Aglow as the white core of creation,
Annunciated in mind,
Beauty moving in godhead, immanent,
Designer and designed.

She is the murmur of ferned creek waters,
The ultimate chord of sound,
The cataract of the blood thundering
When love is crowned.

Hers are the flames of the eucalypt tapers
When September leaf-tips burn,
And the ballet of rose when galahs at sunset
Homeward turn.

She is the tumult of scarlet waiting
To be born in the cold sky,
And the far, green wave that remembers Atlantis,
With her one, strange cry.

She moves no less in man's struggle
Than in moon, jacaranda, or sea,
With the storm-born arc of loveliness curving
In chivalry.

Not only Oates, embracing the blizzard,
Or the rough Bayards who shook
Death's hand at Lone Pine and Kokoda,
Ypres and Tobruk,

Not only these made lustre of courage,
But hosts now dim and unknown
Once glittered in deeds like sunbursts on darkened
Waters strown.

Beauty, the broad Pacific, gathers
Allegiance of myriad streams,
All tributary runnels of home-bright graces,
Diurnal themes.

Each act of grace widens the waters
Till we, in turn, shall find
Hereditary force that runs to endeavour
From forebears of mind.

Gold of the sunlight, mauve of the morning,
That Streeton and Gruner made
Shall ennable our eyes, lifted to gladness
By light's accolade.

Not Osiris alone or Christ resurgent
Shall flower in the miracled springs,
But every seed the wind of the spirit
Earthward flings.

Life from the lifeless, form from the formless,
Fulfil the creation planned:
From the dead stone God's fingers grow mighty
At Rodin's hand.

Kook-koo-koo-ka! Koo-hah-hah-ha-ha!

This is the laughter of light, the saraband
Of sound, the lustiness danced in creation that grows
To pure exuberance, answering Blake's demand
Of beauty. Yet still at evening the laughter froze
The heart to anguish, chilling from depths of the dark,

With irony joined to gusto to make the strange
Australian covenant, where the bushfire's blackening mark
Brands the green pastures in cycles of scuffling change.

For this is the hard, the lean, dry land,
Maker of mirages, begetter of bunyip fear,
Garotter taking the settler by the throat with the hand
Of iron that strangled many a pioneer.
This is the home of the Imp, the mocker who leads
Men on with the green hope for the harvest of gold,
Then kills with the sun, engulfs with the flood, and breeds
Rust, the fluke, and the rabbit—plagues untold.

So we grew gamblers, tough, hard-bitten, taking
The lubra of luck for a mistress, wearing the grin
Of irony's mask to hide the bitterness, making
Sardonic jests for a stoic atebrin
Against malarial fate, wearing the slouch
Of our easy-going, God-send-Sunday gait
As our queer panache; the borak-pokers, with grouch
Against all lordship—of the law, the rich, or the great.

In our land of frustration, mirage, and toil
We grew as the realists, ironists, expecting the blow,
Wary of kisses, watching the billy boil
In silence and singing when our pants begin to go;
Men of the earth, earthy, worshipping Pan
The earth-god; with an old wryness drawn from the drought
And the flood, from the fight to be free, equal as man,
From the chain and the lash, from the claim that petered out.

So the irony entered our soul, to run
Deep in the quizzical blood, making us fleer
At the world's crowns and the red carpets, as the sun
In evening pomp is scorned by the Jackass's jeer.
We are the laughing cavaliers who rode
Once into conquered Jerusalem, not with knees
Bent but stretched to the stirrup, no reverence showed,
But laughed as we took the Holy City's keys.

Yet we are the children of the sun, the Tamburlaine
Who piles flesh for the crows, bones for the ants,
On the cracked earth crying for the exiled rain,
Then turns to the glory of kingship, and wakes romance
With his tocsin, making the stars and angels sing
To entertain divine Zenocrate;
We are the kin of the sun in his journeying,
We share in despair and delight, even we.

So Norman Lindsay, the larrikin ironist who throws
Gibbers at wowsers, cocking a snook at the prude,
Changes to Columbine's delicate limner, and grows
Creator superb and joyous, marching from mood
To mood with the passionate sun; so elder gloom
Is caverned where Brennan, blind Cyclops, plunges in space
To grasp Odyssean beauty, yet takes the doom
Of night in the end with the stars on his upturned face.

So come our ringers, workers, pioneers
Expanding the nineteen counties, blazing their marks
On the far trails, striding on through the years:
Phillip the Founder, Wentworth, Trumper, and Parkes;
Farrar and Kingsford Smith, conquistadors
Of land and air; Murray, guiding a race
From the darkness; Garran and Bean; each soul who explores
The mind's horizons, discovering strength or grace.

Out of the Bush they came, or always turned,
As Antaeus, to grip their power from the heel in our earth:
So Furphy yearned of bullocks and justice; so burned
The heart of Lawson with anger or opened to mirth
And mateship, while with unerring cast he caught
The very knack of our spirit; so Bernard O'Dowd
Drove us, cracking the whip of his far-curled thought,
From the low dust to the dream in the visionary cloud.

In our land of Pan always the dual strain
Swells in the music, as Slessor's five cold bells
Of nescience fade in Fitzgerald's triumphal rain,
While the strange lilt bubbles from Neilson's wells,
And Mary Gilmore, our singing dowser, unfolds
Waters of life that only she can find;
In her vibrant hand the past's green bough she holds,
Divining the Murrumbidgees to sweep through our mind.

We are the sun's children, born to be heirs
To the drought's immolation, to wonder of cobalt skies;
We know eve's raddling shadows and midnight despairs,
But ever at call of the cock-crow light we rise
Exultant, laughing, breeding the men of will
Who build Australia, mind and flesh and bone,
To design of greatness—the arrogant masons who still,
Clan of Macquarie, pile stone on aspiring stone.

The Haunting of Lechery Lodge

By ROBERT CROSSLAND

Philip Lindsay, in his account of the weird and eventful happenings which took place during his brother Ray's tenancy of an old "studio" above a ninepenny eat-up joint in William Street, has made some sort of an attempt to supply us with a ghost-legend. But even the Lindsay opus, replete with learned exegesis (albeit liberally bespattered with the fly-specks of human credulity) is, I am afraid, doomed to failure, especially when examined in the light of subsequent investigations, principally my own. As a chronicle of professional *gaucherie à la vie de Bohème* (and a record of play in the exciting game of "being geniuses together") *I'd Live the Same Life Over* is not without a certain Murgeresque charm. But Lindsay has not, as he thinks, been a wayfarer in the misty regions of the occult.

I am able to throw some light on this bizarre mystery because it so happens that, some years later, I succeeded to the tenancy of the Lindsays' "studio"—although in my time it rejoiced in no such exalted appellation, but was known simply as Lechery Lodge. I am able to recognize it by the queer funnel-shaped aperture—"a kind of inverted bottomless belfry"—in the ceiling; by the attic (which the Lindsays fondly and, as I shall endeavour to point out, not without some foundation, believed to be haunted); and by the all-pervading aroma of boiled cabbage which, along about lunch-time, started to seep up through the floor boards from "the Dago restaurant" below, a disgusting stink which, in the summer months, rendered the place uninhabitable between the hours of noon and 6 p.m. But it was not only the stink which finally unmanned the Lindsays—as, after a tenancy of some twelve more or less hectic months, it was finally to unman me—but the bottomless belfry. "No one really liked to stand beneath it; it was eerie; and you always had the stupid feeling that an uninvited visitor of some kind was snooping about upstairs, liable at any moment to push his black, hideous face down and snarl at you."

Now the simple truth of the matter, divested of all the supernatural trappings with which Lindsay so gloatingly enshrouds it, is this—and if, on the one occasion on which he plucked up sufficient courage to climb upstairs and investigate, he hadn't been struck ("abruptly, inexplicably") with such sudden terror that he "scurried

downstairs like a trodden-on cat", he would, I am quite sure, have found it out for himself—that, in actual fact, an uninvited visitor *was* for ever snooping about upstairs.

To put it quite plainly, he lived there.
It was Quasimodo.

Quasimodo!

What memories cluster about the name!

What gay, unspeakably sad *scènes de la vie de Hobohème!* Ah! what a tale could be woven around him—if only there were one of that happy band who broke their teeth on the hard crusts of the *Café Momus* (it was the *Panthéon*, really, or was the *Panthéon* a few doors up the street?) left to write it! I do not think so. For them, as for me, the spell is broken, Mimi has trilled her last, and Schaunard has struck the final cracked note on his borrowed piano. Only Quasimodo remains—behind (or rather, above!) it all: the grim shadow, soup-guled and bleary-eyed, hovering like an eternal Nemesis above the lost gaiety and departed laughter. Molesting nobody and molested by none; but always there, an eternal reminder of the fate of the genii who dwelled too long in the bottle. For that was the sin of Quasimodo, who, unlike his misshapen namesake, was stricken, not by any physical deformity, but with a Gargantuan zest for that common horror of the dipsodes: plink.*

For—and in loyalty to his memory I put not too fine a point on it—Quasimodo was a . . . dipsomaniac. His was a Lost Week-End that lasted throughout the whole of the Lindsays' tenancy, and through most of mine. The only time I ever saw him sober was the night he went to sleep, wrapped up in the sheets of old newspaper that served as his only covering, with a lighted cigarette in his mouth, and woke up to find me frantically dousing him with buckets of icy water.

He had practically set the joint on fire.

I kept a watchful eye on Quasimodo after that, and learnt a little of his way of life—nothing much, for he was by nature a secretive man and cultivated seclusion: a sort of Beardsley of the bottle. With the typical mug-cunning of the hopeless inebriate, he had removed the pins from the Yale lock on the street door, so that merely by inserting his thumbnail and twisting it slightly he was able to gain entrance to the premises at any hour of the day or night—mostly night. Noiselessly

* Plink: A cheap substitute for plonk.

he would steal upstairs, passing my door on tiptoe, to the attic. And there, under the bare ribs of the rafters, among his pile of old newspapers he would lie down and doze.

He would wake up about mid-day (whether it was daylight or not) and, swearing softly to himself in cuneiform inscriptions, begin to "snoop" about—but quietly, ever so quietly. Sometimes I would catch a glimpse of him, hovering around the head of the staircase, awaiting his chance to slip down unnoticed to the street.

Such occasions were rare, however, and I had for the most part to sense his presence rather than actually discern it—with one notable exception of course, the night of the conflagration. But no such calamity was to mark the Lindsays' tenancy, and Quasimodo remained—and for Philip Lindsay, at least, remains to this day—the "uninvited guest, liable at any moment to push his black, hideous face down and snarl at you", the shadowy poltergeist that was "to deliver the knock-out blow" to his scepticism, and finally convince him that "beyond any doubt, the place was haunted."

Nirvana

The Wheel and all the little wheels are broken:
The paddocks that, once tilled, gave rich increase
Are jungle-overgrown; no word is spoken
On streets where well-fleshed tigers take their ease.
The palace square is thick with sturdy trees;

The ruined irrigation tanks are token
Of reeds long vanished: in perennial peace
The needy and the needless sleep unwoken.

And there above, gigantic Buddha smiles
Untroubled, time-resistant . . . Undismayed,
He has devoured his followers, and beguiles
The years with contemplation of their fate—
The vanity of Action, Being's ills.
Thou too hast conquered. Smile, Compassionate.

MARTIN HALEY

Sequence in Atavism*

Proem

Taunted time made brave and vigorous to entice
the virility of the young and dreaming, shaped
into a coronal of fire and death in the ribs of it,
to quicken a datum of many faust-lives, as when flowers
burst their fences breeding a violence;
for we are articled to sin and sin's remission,
inherit jungle, night and blood, sun-dynamo and rose:
we, christ-convicts, to bait a knout
made of many ribbons of our flesh-lives.

Our gala rots: no fête-time in these houses
but the trapping of blood, the numbering of thorns;
the swollen calyx shapes no passionate equation,
never the cries of known calvaries repeat themselves
to intimate the brass and fire of a *Götterdämmerung!*
Stones tremble in tense hands too well aware
of their lethal agency; death ripostes
with the speed of laughter.

In this malice of nights
I'll nail my shadow down and tear my body free
at the hammer stroke
of parables and legends.

I.

Here, trapped in a camera lens:
foundries manufacturing convict-souls, forests
pulped into cycles of lies: villages fired like slash:
pillage and recrimination, while slow famine toils
above the parched and eroded plains; and the oceans
atlased in pockets of pain, battles, names
of ships, red veins for the roads of commerce
which chart the kingdom of Moby Dick—mapped
and doubly mapped and no surprise in the howl of it; . . .
and the sky there: a handful of clouds
hurdles of the unknown, but cancelled
to the playground of the agile acrobat.

It's all here, captured in print, and no surprise in it,
no space in it, no miracle; behind the leaves

* Third prize (with "Nine o'clock", by David Rowbotham) in the *Sydney Morning Herald*
Verse Competition, 1948-9.

no mystery, no whisper of oracle from old caves
and the wonder spoils on our lips. . . .

Only in our mirrors is a semblance of the old
ritual pursued, as strange as the riddle of clock,
deciphering a galaxy of faces behind our own face;
we fear, knowing there is more to it
but we can't pronounce it, only provoke it
in the guilt resemblance of ourselves . . .
the manna of death slight in our mouth.

Caught in the throat of loneliness we fear
to welcome, we are made, at times, reluctantly aware
that maps and compasses, radar and seismograph
can tell us nothing of this thing
nor explain shadows and shudders of winds,
comets and moving lights, the ancient stars.
We huddle panic warmth, our hour and amazement,
the pulse in our hand not understood
as a curfew-hour and waiting, torn
by discovery!

We are not born
without the fruit of old sins, old ceremonies, compact
like a coiled spring within us; for the family curse
compels our blind acceptance of a deed
we cannot call our own.

Mortal is
our short span, mortgaged by ancient debts, taught
to genuflect in the name of many dead, to show them
allegiance—and question it; names, myths,
bidding the stones speak; while the old
incant to us, admonish us in observance,
remind us of our bondage, garland the guilt cup. . . .
Defy them, smash mirrors, manufacture pigments
to our modern temper, gauntlet against their graves—
yet still there is the observance and the counting
and, in spite of all, time to be bargained with,
not learning time may not be unfurled like a flag
and taken in again, and what is squandered and lost
may only be redeemed by a long constancy
and a long silence.

For it is not merely in words—
nomads: victims of our soul's grievous gala—
but the patterning is there: the still forming shape
beyond the utterance of words; we feel it, clasp it
in our strangest copulations, fashion and destroy it,
and the wonder spoils on our lips. . . .

Being onlookers is never sufficient:
 the stage is there and the players, fate
 and the subtle protagonists, their locked embrace
 darker, more intimate than any love. Passion
 and verdict: until, like a skilled thief in the night,
 the clock insists upon the hour, the act repeats itself.
 But we—we are more than spectators of an alien drama;
 the passion's in the core of us, the fall of the dice,
 and the players cast their shadow, as our progenitors,
 on our upturned, recipient faces, speak within us, speak,
 adjoin our participation, frolic, weep in our own shoes,
 translate our Goodman's-croft.

The return is always to the same point.
 They show us time: not graph or asymptotic image,
 but as the wheel spins. Ground covered is history;
 but for us, the acts, the evolutions of the wheel, for us
 return is always to the same point, the hub our equilibrium
 our moment of acceptance and of ceremony.

Acts do not alter:
 history, the ground covered, appears to change,
 suggests the revolution of the change, as shifts
 of landscape bribe in us conceit of travelling;
 yet we are still players and audience
 captured in theatre alchemy,
 re-enacting the old myths, letting them grow
 under the skin of us, into the blood of us,
 adding their semblance to our already own,
 to corrode the deeper, acid sin added to sin,
 hammer blow upon hammer blow, tide upon tide;
 they do not change, the curfew and the burial time,
 the waxen rose, the poisoned cup, and yet—
 we are always amazed:

II.

I can see there is more to it
 when we falter before a memory,
 when the shapes which prowl without our doors
 become a catechism, and what we sought to forget
 we recapitulate at nightfall, a litany
 of questions disguising an unhealed wound.
 Consider, while the players remain to show us
 bullet and gavotte is history: nor any birth
 without a death, and virtue in that guilt which crowned
 our brow with thorn and sun; but see, despair goads us
 still, a guerilla in the nights, an ambush fought
 with obsolete weapons, no chance of outside support,

and what remission gained never permanent. . . .
the pause that follows the sudden and fearful testament,
as silence succeeds a curfew, is frequently discomfort,
a sense of something lurking on thresholds, without a name—
or it is possible nothing has been seen, nothing believed
(we only imagined it, the frozen tension of shock):
place, stage, the famine of desperate eyes, the same!
Between the acts, the dancers like the figures of clock
remind us of the hour, but we are for ever deceived:
some hounded to obey the rag-time pulse of music
that restricts them to the paralysis of motion;
others, sitting in chairs, waiting their turn (skull
unresponsive to sun-touch), the brisk bleak surgeon,
some angelus, a night of Calvary, the Saturday show—
but always the messenger waiting at the closed door
will not be let in, and home is exile still
(the shape of wisdom disguised the same shape)
and any journey to cross the frontier only escape
into yet another exile; without respite, I say, for content
is not man's heritage. Unable to realize that the value
is not in the achievement
but the dedication, the radiance of purpose
which (when ceasing to be onlookers) drives us to pursue
some deliberate odyssey, guarded grail or more than rose.

For look! there is more to it; these foot-
prints, soon obliterate, preserve awhile
the place from which the wanderer set out
upon some endless quest, and fell
in an unmarked spot;
and we who remain in our unlit houses,
celebrating our feast-days, and precise
in the endless observation of anniversaries,
read of it in newspapers, suitably regretted,
over breakfast, planning the week-end joint,
(more aware of daily issues
than the legendary challenge); yet surely
all might be changed, if we could grow
to emulate the inarticulate devotion
of the polar wanderer: do not turn back
nor imperfectly
seek to retrace your steps in the deliberate snow.

III.

In our hour of indecision
when even the choice may betray us, the hour
between one wind and another, when we walk the circles

of our protracted death, conscious of the sky's riddle
 and the sky's neglect, when all things are in flux
 all familiar things, and, destitute of even a measure
 of equilibrium, there is only the ape-like chattering,
 the undisciplined gestures, the frightful chaos of fingers
 disposing guilt with a random justice; and the loud noises
 of cities, designed to elude the judgment of weathers,
 bruise-drum of mirth when the howl of dog shall announce
 the blind man goes whose stick at night is a warning
 note, bidding us rise and guard our doors
 —but death is entered with the speed of silence. . . .

When the clock stopped, all things familiar moved, all places and things
 moved into space, even the algebra of sun and moon,
 tram-tracks, the tattered streams of light, voices,
 concert programmes, all these moved into space
 and consciousness diminished to a fixed point; they know
 the terminal where conflict stays its darts. . . .

Hosts of a timeless weeping, they dream in their rest
 it is the remembered garden, and have not surprise;
 within olive shades they move gently, speak
 in low voices, exchange glances, and their hands
 in touching release each other, meditate to pray:
 O suffer us to acquire the still point of decision!

In the green hour, the hour of surprise and division,
 in the hour of down-going and of sin confessed
 when the voice of portent replaces the multiple cries
 of birds in the upper branches, they move in the antique
 light and, kneeling, make tools of their hands,
 thrust up and arrange the conceptual clay.

When the rain shall come in a green wind, they
 foresee in the seed the grown tree, the provision
 of seasons, the budding, the fruit, the seeding, the arrest
 of winter preparing renewal, and their eyes
 let out a wonder, more actual than lips to speak,
 an antennæ more delicate than tongue or any hands.

By the swift and perpetual river, with solemn hands
 they reverence the tree, the fruit, the crucial clay
 of sorrow; in the hour of up-rising, the collision
 of seasons, when a sudden call breaks on their rest
 and they are again with those who are held by the eyes
 of attachments, unable to discern what they seek.

SOUTHERLY

If this bitter spring (of denial of those who seek
with the shallow ambitions of nervous hands,
informed to covet, lethal, unable to pray)
should pledge an end to this endless sequence of revision;
from pain of return afford us some hour of arrest
when time may lose its relevance to cause surprise.

In this famine spring, we cannot ignore the cries
of those who are innocent or without purpose, or weak
with suspense and the agitation of their hands;
we dare not disown the inspiration of lips to pray—
to invoke the vigil, the garden, the grace of decision,
when jungle and rose may abide at some point of arrest.

Horizons of unrest echo the weeping of our cries,
the stones to speak, adjure that nervous hands
shall not betray us in this our time of decision.
For it is clear the delayed legacy cannot undo the thief
or benifice of pardon in the twelfth hour restore
the erosion exile takes of us, or gesture of freedom wipe out
awareness of a weight of chains; nor any ecstasy of beast
redeem the devastation of the heart; for even the rose is gone,
the tree denied, and there's no armistice within our souls
but the numbering of possessions in a ruined house:
and true of all of us, in this our hour of decision.

IV.

Listen: who abide by the tenderness of mirrors
This is the hour for the breeding of new violence,
the hour of new hungers and of new adorations,
and betrayals—and the hour, also, of new horizons.
But listen: when our days of gala numbered, far better not
to reject the disturbing admonition of wind
until we are more sure of our premise;
for is there not the miracle of stones
animate with the heat of hands which fling them,
bruising the flesh to the radiance of speech?
is there not the mystery of metals conceived by earth,
fathered by sun, made pregnant by many weathers?
and the devious journeying of our roots where darkness
cannot be darkness? moreover, there is the renewal of tides,
of seasons when the darkness of our birth re-enters into us:
since it is true, I think, we are tempered
by the fires of obscure temptations
—for is not the seasoned timber
the subtle craftsman's choice
for the metal of his chisel and His Christ?

Reject fear for a moment: is it not better to voyage
for what are the alternatives? but shipwreck
or staying tight in a bung-hole: to dole out,
make tabu, preserve the hag-end of time . . .
as if that were enough! Far better to voyage
although, it is true, what do we know of charts
frequently inaccurate, nor is the rhythm of sea
the pace of the boulevards, nor its mystery
the chaotic strictness of the seasons,
but ambiguous as the punishing of saints.
If vision fails, purpose, plagued by memory
and the squalor of voices, retreats, a hunted prey
drained out to a tissue of flimsy hopes, rotten
with still anchorage—better the hazard, remembering
there is the promise of sea, the renewal of tides,
countering the hungry gulp of rivers, seizure of ships,
cargoes and men; there is still the promise of sea,
discharging its debt to the land, as the promise of God
as mysterious as a cry from the throat of silence.
For life, I think, is a voyage of many miracles,
touching on reefs and fountainheads, lands
whose coasts spawn in change like a promise
forever renewed. . .

As we follow the trail of summer into winter
in cities where the pavements sprout in hunger and lust
or where the sorrow of sun has plundered our land,
we hesitate—capable of so many deceptions, yet aware
there are still the things we must sanction in memory
and hold fast against the pressure of clock,
the Judas tongues preparing Gethsemane:

There is the piety of old wounds
received in the simple and frequently futile defence
of famous doorways, bridges, and passions
not understood, but fought for—and questioned afterwards;
there is the ricochet of unspeakable deeds
on the innocent, the legacy of ills
for which we have been rendered no accounting, and
the insistence upon some act of ceremony, or the simple
and unquestioning dedication of the polar wanderer,
of scholars and saints; moreover, the reasonable chance
to encounter in our life's journey the unexpected
act of atonement; and, finally, the compassion of hands
laid on the brows of the dying, the sick, and those who are
rejected and without rest, knowing only the speech of the damned,
and the naked of heart who shall have innocence again. These:

these things shall we sanction against our falling worlds,
against the bitter time when the sky is wild with blood,
that sometime, when the ape in us shall not corrupt our hearts,
man will find voice to swear the mystery of his wound's compassion—
and may this bitter surgery yet make us whole again
for there is no distinction between the dying and the birth.

RAEMONDE ALAIN

These Too, Horatio?

Old the night as Egypt's sphinx
and the eagle's iron scream
echoes through its deepest dream
and the howling of the lynx

but the ghosts that claim the night
wail and moan the pulse to stir
they can only feel through fear
they can only live through fright

they can only glimpse the moon
from some riven Elsinore
pain their portion as of yore
woe their pleasure and their boon

sorrow is their flesh and blood
bone and nerve and heart and breath
death their life and life their death
drowned, they gesture in the flood

beckoning with its flow and ebb
like the kelp-weed tempest-torn
drifting rootless and forlorn
spent things washing in its web

wrack agleam with ghastly fires
wraiths of longing and regret
and residual desires
thronging to the sea's shore yet

clutching numbly at the land
fumbling feebly at life's door
scrabbling drearily the shore
barely cyphering the sand

PETER HOPEGOOD

Nine O'Clock*

In old fields and the country of novice farms
 The sun flares into premature fire at nine
 O'clock. The tractor burns in the cracked lane
 And overhead in prophetic echelons swarms
 Of ibises, sweeping from coastal storms, decline
 Towards the mountains. His dry lips question "Rain?"
 With cynic negation and a shrugged nonchalance,
 Remnants of broken hopes. What struggle of birth
 Makes him stand up beside his furrowed earth?
 He stays, knowing no other refuge, among
 The brittle days that destroy the adventure in Chance
 And twist his supple youth to a humped thong.

Cursing intangibles—the no-rain no-love,
 The heart's disease, the body's rancour, the spoil
 Of wind and dust—he drives his shuffling tractor
 Into the paddock of dead corn and rifted soil,
 Wondering how long the aptitude to live
 Shall save uprooted man, decimal creature
 In the marathon world. He shuns expectancy,
 Thrusts hate into the ground that fostered him;
 Breeds, unaware, a blind defiance that shall bloom
 In renewal when the glorious anger of grain, like a sea
 That is unsuppressible, rears from its origin;
 For out of the squalid season beauty may come

Shielding the slopes, raising the fields to the old
 Heart-hopes prevalent when he was young.
 The tractor roars along his birthright, dragging
 The plough across a face of virgin song
 For generations levelled into flagging
 Growth and fallow days, in winter cold
 With charring frost, in summer lit with waves
 Of barren heat, at all times veiled with fear.
 But though he chafes in his soul's furrowed groove,
 Suffers the seasons' indecisions and slaves
 To shift a mortgage from his shoulders, love
 Is by his right hand and beauty in his ear.

* Third prize (with "Sequence in Atavism" by Raemonde Alain) in the *Sydney Morning Herald Verse Competition*, 1948-9.

For you cannot kill the blue wren with drought
While the bright spring tongues the mossy rock. Her voice,
Superlatively moist and pliant, makes
All emptiness a whispered fulfilment and thought
A softer thing. She comes from the hidden place
Of leaf and water, interpreting a memorable lake's
Calm distances and cool lips calling from
The ibises' forsaken country of storm.
Oh, remember Terranora mornings, farmer,
At nine o'clock? And your Terranora girl
Sleeping below the eastern hills, still the charmer
Tantalising through that far farewell? . . .

The cream van trundling to the low gate shatters
Memory; takes on one meagre can from the box
That stands askew through the burning hours, and scatters
Biting gravel down the dissolving road
As it grates on dust out of sight. Trees seem wax
Illusions and the profile of the god
Carved in the granite hill tightens a black lip.
There's a dazzling letter for the pallid woman
Who shakes the night's parched sleep from the splitting room
In the worn-out house near the mill, and he carries it up
To her, relaxing like life in the lull of the moment.
She smiles a little and leans on her moulting broom.

He has forgotten his fathers in habitual airs
Of aridness and she her city kin
And one-time loveliness. Their words of the lover
And lover, long whittled by toil, survive in thin
Remarks and silences, or vehement prayers.
This is the stand-still episode, for over
Spirit falls the tragic halt, and the four
Dry sides of the withered year enclose and crust
The possessive breath, turn early summer sour
And impoverish the blood. Only the dust
Goes on, the red angel, the storm on the granite-rock,
And first prospect of the heart at nine o'clock.

DAVID ROWBOTHAM

Writer and Reader

POETS OF THREE COUNTRIES

- Language of the Sand: Poems* by Roland E. Robinson. (Lyre-Bird Writers, Sydney, 1949. 3s. 6d.)
Cyclone: Selected Poems of Victor Kennedy. (Jindyworobak, Melbourne, 1949. n. p.)
Face to the Sun. By Arthur Murphy. (Arura Writers, Melbourne, 1949. 7s. 6d.)
The Secret Listener. By Ernest Briggs. (Dunrobin Edition, Brisbane, 1949. n. p.)
Blow, Wind of Fruitfulness. By James K. Baxter. (The Caxton Press, Christchurch, N.Z., 1948. 6s.)
Disputed Ground: Poems 1939-45. By Charles Brasch. (The Caxton Press, 1948. 6s.)
Until that Dawn: Lyrics by Dorothy Una Ratcliffe. (University of London Press Ltd, 1949. 6s.)
The Watcher: Poems by William Wolff. (British Authors' Press, 1949. 6s.)
The Darkened Window: Poems by Nancy Cato. (Lyre-Bird Writers, 1950.)
Wentworth Place and Other Poems. By Robert Gittings. (William Heinemann Ltd, 1950. 8s. 6d.)
Selections from the Lyrical Poems of Evangeline Ryves. (British Authors' Press, 1949. 6s.)

The Jindyworobaks are still lost in their dream of Alcheringa, persuading themselves that the basis for a vital contemporary Australian culture is to be found somewhere in darkest Arnhem Land.

The fanatical preoccupation with a subject-matter supposed to be peculiarly "real" and appropriate is to be seen in the latest volume of one of the most gifted of the sect, Mr Roland E. Robinson. The titles of the first four lyrics in *Language of the Sand* are significant: "Black Cockatoos", "Billabong", "Ghost Gum", "Tree of the Plain". If the subject-matter engenders a feeling of monotony, this is not dispelled by Mr Robinson's fondness for repeating images and favourite words ("spears of reeds", "opal sky", "scream" etc.). In the eight lines of the opening poem he uses the phrase "screaming flight" twice (though with a modification in meaning) as well as the verb "scream": he also flings a palette of brilliant colours—red, black, purple, jade-green—in our faces. This, however, is not mere recklessness, as he proclaims in the concluding lines:

So shall I find me harsh and blendless words
of barbarous beauty enough to sing this land.

Mr Robinson is a craftsman as well as a patriot. His talent is chiefly descriptive; he can create a verbal picture with clarity of design and the flamboyant colour of a Matthew Smith. He can also achieve quieter effects, as in these lines:

The household sleeps. That cry on cry is fled
beyond dark shores of pines and those unstirred
moon-pale oceans of the standing grain.

One of the most restrained, and also most successful, poems is "The Drovers", which creates a unified image of the men and the landscape to which they belong. Here, in few but memorable words, Mr Robinson records his vision of something distinctively Australian.

Nancy Cato's *The Darkened Window* appears in the same series as *Language of the Sand*, and some of her poems also describe the hot, parched landscapes of this "sprawled continent". Even the moon can suggest a typically Australian image

SOUTHERLY

to her: in "The Two Birds" she sees it as a feather flying from the white cockatoo of the morning, contrasting with "the parrot sunset", "the flame-breasted Bird of evening". But in other poems she looks not out but within herself; in these more personal lyrics she is haunted by Time—the enemy whose hand will some day

reach up, switch off the light,
And let in all-pervading night. ("The Shelter").

who makes even the Southern Cross appear as

My bitterest enemy, the clock.

An old man mowing grass becomes in her imagination

Time in a patched waistcoat and an old felt hat
In our back paddock cutting down the past. ("Man with a Scythe")

Her reflection in a tram-window makes her meditate on the meaning of reality, and she sees life itself as a crowded tram:

But one by one we leave the light
And drop off into the vast night. ("Tram Through the Parklands")

In these poems Nancy Cato reveals a gift for the apt image, the neat phrase.

Victor Kennedy's *Cyclone* and Arthur Murphy's *Face to the Sun* also have Jindyworobak associations. Mr Kennedy writes enthusiastically of tropical scenery and sunlight but he does not always use words sensitively: his verse lacks style. Mr Murphy is a more skilled technician and, as Mr R. G. Howarth points out in his foreword, his use of rhythmic variation is both deliberate and subtle. But that is the main point of interest in his volume, where love-lyrics jostle tenuous poems on swagmen, crows and billabongs.

Ernest Briggs is a poet of an altogether different kind from the Jindyworobaks. It is a pity that *The Secret Listener* should be ushered in with so many plaudits of sponsors, for his quiet and modest art needs no such advertisement. He is a natural lyrist whose verse moves always with grace, whether in the songlike rhythm of "The Old Stepping-Stile" or the subtle variation and pausing of "The Swan", as seen in these lines:

The cool declension
Of a dream,
It seemed to be so much of rhyme
That Time
Could never, never smutch
That tranquil image, never touch
The clear suspension
Of the hour,
But what can stop Time's certain flow
Or curb its power?

The themes of these lyrics are usually commonplaces (for example, the evanescence of beauty in the sonnet "On a Summer's Day", with an affirmation in the sestet of the poet's acceptance of the consoling power of Nature; man's mortality and the glorious compensations of his state, in "So Tenuous a Thing"). Sometimes, as in "Two Simple Things" (one of the few poems in which his sureness of touch fails him) and the pretty sonnet "Christmas, 1934", it may

seem that Mr Briggs is overdoing the cult of simplicity; such an attitude easily becomes mawkish unless the poet can convince us of his mental vigour. At his best, however, Mr Briggs achieves a true and untainted simplicity, in lyrics with a delicacy of finish which does not obscure their fundamental strength of feeling: in "These are Joy", for example, (variation on a theme nobly stated in the first book of *The Faerie Queene*), and "Slowness is Beauty", a worthy affirmation of the true artist's ideal:

Slowness is beauty;
Sing it as you make
Your noble statue or your polished rhyme
For you are fashioning that which shall break
The teeth of Time.

Two interesting New Zealand poets are represented in Numbers 2 and 3 of the Caxton Poets series. Charles Brasch's *Disputed Ground* shows him to be in the tradition of the English poets of the 'thirties; though he writes of his own land in the opening poem, "Forerunners", he is clearly content to look abroad for his technique. Poems like "Karitane" and "Wevelsfleth" prove that he has a gift for describing a scene, but he is rarely content with mere description; he reflects on what he sees, and the uncertainties of human destiny impinge always on his consciousness. In attitude he shows a certain kinship with Louis MacNeice, but he has not MacNeice's sharp satiric sense.

James K. Baxter also, while not wholly detaching himself from his native background, is more interested in his inner world of thought and feeling. In "O Wind Blowing", for example, he ponders on the theme of life in death which is suggested by the "wind of dissolution" which is also "wind of creation":

Under the sodden pines I have lain and listened
To the voice of quiet death speaking from air and branches
Inexpressibly mournful, inexpressibly still
Wind-music, sea-music.
I looked to my feet and among the rotted needles
Saw hyacinths bloom.

Mr Baxter is certainly my pick from this batch of Australasian poets. He knows how to make full use of the poetic overtones of words; and he has the ability to make every word in a line tell. His style is varied, extending from the witty intimacy of that difficult and delightful form the verse-letter, exemplified in "Letter to Noel Ginn II", to the deep-toned elegiac beauty of "Poem in Naseby Graveyard", in which the grave music of the octosyllabic couplets proves him to have unusual mastery of rhythm.

Robert Gittings, a poet known to B.B.C. listeners, has named his first published collection *Wentworth Place*. The title-piece is a series of poems about Keats, showing different aspects of the poet's character; as a composition it is invertebrate. I preferred three poems with Sicilian backgrounds; something in "this gorgon-hardened land" seems to have released a secret store of creative energy in Mr Gittings "The Tomb of Theron" is addressed to Luigi Pirandello, whom he imagines speaking to him from his tomb, characteristically discoursing on illusion—

Our dilemmas
Predispose us to deceive.

SOUTHERLY

"The Greek Theatre, Taormina" juxtaposes past and present: as he muses on the spot where an audience once watched a Greek play the poet is reminded that the performance is over,

the morning
Untenanted, late, by two thousand years

"Acis and Galatea", a longer poem which won the Greenwood Award for 1948, is an excellent version of the story first told by Ovid. Against an idyllic background of sunshine and sea and vineyards and the bright Mediterranean flowers, the story of Acis is related: his encounter with the nymphs, the unnoticed coming of Polyphemus

With sullen dusk of huge desire to see his Galatea,

the hurling of the rock, the death of Acis. Mr Gittings demonstrates that it is still possible for a classical legend to be retold effectively in modern idiom.

Two English women poets, Dorothy Una Ratcliffe and Evangeline Ryves, are alike in the pleasure they find in the beauty of the natural world but are otherwise dissimilar. Miss Ratcliffe's *Until that Dawn* is a collection of lyrics (some of them in Yorkshire dialect) chiefly celebrating rural life; their outstanding quality is the loving observation of Nature revealed in them. The selections from the lyrical poems of Miss Ryves show her to be a more individual poet. Her vision penetrates beyond the seen to the unseen; a gnat to her is not a gnat but a "lost string from heavenly orchestra". At worst there is something original in her point of view: at her best, as in the poem "Departure", there is a happy audacity of thought and image.

The poems in William Wolff's *The Watcher* are more pretentious than any of the others discussed, but they display a fatal tortuousness of rhythm and diction. His fondness for preposterous compounds and for abstract and unnatural expressions can be indicated by a few quotations:

Tea beside the lock, girl-brillianted.

Your tall young beauty was frock-beautified.

Yes, the wit of words wars and we are beggared
By highly focused flow.

As I lie here, sometimes lazily listening as the efficient curiosity
of your talk
Expresses your vitality.

I suppose Mr Wolff meant something by these lines—but how could he ever mistake them for poetry?

T. G. HERRING

TOPICAL RADIO PLAYS

Five Radio Plays. Edited by A. A. Phillips. (Longmans Green & Co., Melbourne, 1949, 6s. 6d.)

Of the five plays in this volume, three have, I imagine, been subjected to critical analysis often enough—MacLeish's "The Fall of the City", Stewart's "The Fire on the Snow" and MacNeice's "The Dark Tower"—and they are, too, plays that readily invite literary comment: even when the dish is allegoric or esoteric, we know which knife and fork to use. In what way, however, does one approach Norman Corwin's "Untitled"? This is pointedly a play with a message, and the message is conveyed through what amounts to a series of testimonies with a connecting commentary which itself turns into a testimony at the end, the testimony of Hank Peters, an American soldier killed in the war, whose final comment runs:

From my acre of now undisputed ground I will be listening:
 I will be tuned to clauses in the contract where the word Democracy appears
 And how the freedoms are inflected to a Negro's ear.
 I shall listen for a phrase obliging little peoples of the earth:
 For Partisans and Jews and Puerto Ricans,
 Chinese farmers, miners of tin ore beneath Bolivia;
 I shall listen how the words go easy into Russian
 And the idiom's translated to the tongue of Spain.
 I shall wait and I shall wait in a long and long suspense
 For the password that Peace is setting solidly.

On that day, please to let my mother know
 Why it had to happen to her boy.

We may ask how the play will sound in twenty years' time. The question is irrelevant as far as Mr Corwin's purpose is concerned: he is not writing for posterity; he wants us to become politically mature now with Hank Peters. But if we try to treat a radio play as literature (often an unfair practice, for there are plenty of very good dramatic entertainments that are not very good literature) we have to think in terms of durability as well as of other things, and many of the ideas and phrases in "Untitled" will probably lose their strength as the years pass. There is, too, a danger that much of the testifying, with its understanding convincingness, will appear—perhaps already appears—banal as the particular emotional surges set moving by the war pass from our recollection. Not that the dialogue is all as normal and everyday as, say, the Girl's speech: "We'd been keeping company for three years before the war broke out, and I wanted to get married right after Pearl Harbour, but he enlisted . . ." Hank Peters speaks in a simple rhetoric that is in general heart-reaching if not heart-stirring, and is at the same time "functional", a useful word that appears in the lengthy Author's Comments at the end of the play. In these Comments, as well as discussing political and social matters, Mr Corwin makes suggestions about the interpretation of his characters; and his creations sound much more complicated and interesting here than they appear in the play. Which brings us again to the play versus literature problem: voice nuances in the Hank Peters monologues could make all the difference between his appearing a rather obvious mouthpiece for the author, and his taking shape as a credible human being.

Certainly as aural drama the play is well planned. There is repetition in a large sense—the binding force of Hank's commentary—and repetitions of phrase and construction within most of the speeches. The ears of the listeners would be refreshed, too, by a variety of voices, a variety which conceals the essentially static nature of the play, the illustration of an argument rather than the creation of human situations from which a conception may be abstracted.

"The Harbour Called Mulberry", by Cecil McGivern, is even less the creation of human situations of a personal kind. The protagonist is a harbour, that extraordinary prefabricated harbour that was floated in pieces to the beaches of Normandy towards the end of the war. The "plot" deals with the evolution of that harbour, and is fascinating in the same way as an exercise in logic or a complicated and successful chemical experiment. How to land an army to open a second front is the problem. Direct attacks on major ports prove impracticable. Floating piers are considered for use on open beaches. Bubble-breakwaters. Fixed breakwaters. Sunken breakwaters. And so on. Finally comes the Mulberry project, and the drama intensifies with the problems of manpower and materials and time.

Now all this, when written down, sounds like a dull rehash of war news. In the play it is compelling and exciting. The Narrator is continuously active, bringing people forward, asking questions, swinging us over from War Office meeting to sailor to engineer to labour gang, describing actions, commenting and interpreting. The innumerable interviews with men at work are crisp and convincing, and the description, towards the end, of the invading Second Front fleet is solidly stirring. Many kinds of dramatic devices are used to heighten tension: the Second Front agitator's voice, for instance, continually interrupting a War Office meeting, arouses a quite paining resentment in the reader, who, from the facts already shown him, can see how slaughterous and disastrous would be the landing of an army at any of the heavily defended harbours along the coast of France, and how hopeless it would be to try to land an army and its supplies without a harbour.

I must say I found "The Harbour Called Mulberry" exciting. It is a relief sometimes to get away from love and ambition and similar commonplaces of literature and life. To read this play is to be immersed in tactics, and at the same time to have a panoramic view of human ingenuity, perseverance and collective endeavour. A documentary play is never quite a literary creation: we are given a record rather than a revelation, facts that have not been transmuted and given more than temporal life. This being admitted, "The Harbour Called Mulberry" may now be summed up as a vigorous and enheartening piece of work.

DAWN WOOD

POETIC INTUITION

Woman to Man. By Judith Wright. (Angus and Robertson, 1949. 7s. 6d.)

Miss Wright's latest volume clearly indicates a steady development, a passing from strength to strength. The more subjective poems such as "Woman to Man" and "Woman's Song" I find less satisfying, however, than other lyrics in the series.

They do not exhibit to the same extent the poet's command of vital language, the tension of keenly wrought imagery and thought moving to a perfect whole. But other deeps are sounded in the verse, the primitive cleavage of flesh to flesh in "Woman to Man" strongly conveying passion and power. This is not the brutal and pagan world of A. D. Hope's "Necrophile", where love is a physical spasm as final as death, and as remote. Rather does Judith Wright make of the love embrace a supreme attack on the spiritual as well as the physical world of being, a world built up on a foundation of passionate acceptance. The following lines are emotionally vibrant:

This is the strength that your arm knows,
the arc of flesh that is my breast,
the precise crystals of our eyes.
This is the blood's wild tree that grows
the intricate and folded rose.

In "Woman's Song" there is a subtle harmony born of the mother's dreaming urge towards her child, splendid yet fulfilled, lost yet darkly knowing and mournfully prescient of a life that though sprung from spontaneous joy can yet endure deepest travail. A slowness of verse music is evident at the beginning of the poem, but later the lines become charged with love's electricity of feeling, which is sustained until the end of the lyric. Observe the vivid flash of light in "The knife of day is bright", and the fluctuating accents of

so move in me, my darling,
whose debt I cannot pay.
Pain and the dark must claim you,
and passion and the day.

The poem, "Conch-shell" brings in the music and mystery of the sea, its power and the atmosphere that encircles the strange forces given birth in translucent depths where life is something negative and lost, yet having some affinity with human impulse. In "The Sisters" many conflicting stages of emotion and experience are outlined, the inevitable passing of youth to age becomes symbolized in the loss of desire, "courting", "dancing", "the smells of leather and wine". Against this background are the nostalgic whisperings of the sisters blending with shadow and sun, their withered heads nodding with the sudden excited frenzy of awakened thought and spent passion as the sun, a life force, "moves on the veranda", illuminating the drabness of the present. "The Bull" is remarkable for the unleashed menace of the imagery, the building up of atmosphere with an apparently inconsequent use of fugitive words, but this same structure is impressive when the poem is read as a whole. The first stanza is invested with a dreaminess, a languor born of the sexual content of the bull supreme amongst the sex he has conquered. Power is drawn out of the full recesses of the forests, the green strength of the grasses, and the passive drowsiness of a summer noon. Each of the stanzas perfectly displays the bull in the varying stages of his career. Note the fine inspiration of:

The summer-grass was thick with honey-daisies
where he, a curled god, a red Jupiter,
heavy with power among his women lay.

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The same might that builds up the bull drags him down, and the inglorious rout is on:

He thunders powerless,
The red storm of his body shrunk with fear,
runs the great bull, the dogs upon his heels.

This ability of the poet to merge herself with all natural forces, delving deep into the almost inexpressible in verse of highly wrought formation and full content, is again displayed in "The Cycads". Here is the identical music's chant, the passing from time present to time immemorial in one brilliant sweep of thought and image. This world is one doomed and forgotten, chasmed out of the obscure womb of Time.

A different note is struck in "Metho Drinker"—a poem terrible in its graphic delineation of human degradation and suffering. The music of the verse contains some of the intense fire of "Nigger's Leap: New England". Both poems are nerved with the immensity of tragic experience and loss of complete salvation with flesh and spirit entrapped in life's intricate network. The poem "Metho Drinker" however, is more powerful in conception and execution, with lines etched deeply on a background of the mind's final dissolution. Phrases such as "his white and burning girl", "his woman of fire", are outstanding examples of keen poetic conception wherein this crazed wisp of humanity is caught up in the white and evil arms of an alluring Circe, whose red lips hold for ever the inmost recesses of tortuous pain and agonized death:

It was for Death he took her; death is but this
and yet he is uneasy under her kiss
and winces from that acid of her desire.

Delicately conceived are the verses "Stars" and "The Old Prison" with their slender composition of sound and imagery and simplicity of form. These poems are made up of quiet alliterative echoes, especially observed in the verse entitled "Stars". The suggestiveness of underlying rich music moving on different nuances of sound recalls some songs of Mozart, airy and tender:

O flight of golden birds
or swarm of moths in a beam
or fish in a dark sea—
she to whom I cling.

In "The Bones Speak" there are darker subtleties of thought and image, and an attempt to pierce the mists of antiquity enveloping the battlements of departed years. This poem has some of the deep philosophic content of "The Moving Image" but the roots do not spread as deeply and the thought is somewhat vague. The careful arrangement of words gives the sense of brooding and unvoiced fear that permeates the whole poem, the sense of impending catastrophe brought out by the heap of bones which become a symbol at once of man's triumph and his failure in a mutable world.

This same theme to some extent is brought out in "The Blind Man" series which is a chronicle portraying the lives of a family named Delaney. The singer is a blind man and his words seek out the lives of long forgotten generations of Delaneys and their heroic endeavours to carve a living out of virgin scrub.

These lines move with fervid assurance and great ease of utterance, and the words conjure out of the past the hates and lusts that are a tradition in the growth of any country. The feud between white and black becomes monumental in realism with the sun and hills and gums as a nostalgic background. Though all are dust, and gone for ever are all aspirations and fears, the singer turns to the child as the promise of a new generation. The poem, as are many of the others, is somewhat fatalistic in tone and theme, and there is no robust affirmation of life's often joy and strength, and the music that moves out into the shadows is the music of subdued defeat. This is enunciated in:

I am the yellow snake with a dark, a double tongue
speaking from the dust to the two rulers of the world.

Judith Wright uses suggestive phrasing as one of her most effective weapons in verse, and her restlessly probing mind can merge at will into all natural manifestations. The final effects of her best work are not just a superficial lushness, a striving after artificial release of emotion, but each poem working as one complete unit stresses in the mind of the reader a more powerful awareness of life's central scene, a penetration to the core of the unexpressed. Perhaps there is room in her work for a more defiant gusto, a more vigorous painting of the world's metaphysical challenge even when her verse medium appears to be shackling adequately her most moving thought. In the longer and the shorter lyrical series, however, we are always made definitely aware that Judith Wright at her most inspired pitch ranks with the best and most highly reflective poets in the land.

ARTHUR MURPHY

TRAHERNE OF OUR TIMES

Elected Silence. By Thomas Merton. (Hollis and Carter, London, 1949. Published in America under the title of *The Seven-Storey Mountain*.)

[The contributor of this article was a friend of Thomas Merton's father and mother (now both dead) and has first-hand knowledge of much of the material in his book. It is regretted that through lack of space her personal reminiscences must be omitted. Thomas Merton spent his early years in France, and afterwards lived in America and England. The title of the book is from a poem by Hopkins.—Editor.]

Thomas Merton was born into a period of unfaith and insecurity. His wish was to become a writer, but he seems to have given up the idea without protest and allowed himself to be persuaded to study for the Diplomatic or Consular service. Bilingual already, he spent holidays in Germany, and there was also a journey to Italy. In Rome he found to his surprise, for he was then indifferent to religion, that the mosaics in Christian churches meant more to him than Pagan antiquities. Visiting the monastery of the Tre Fontane in the quiet Campagna, he "walked up and down in the silent afternoon under the eucalyptus trees", and there the thought came to him: "I should like to be a Trappist monk." But that thought, like his intense interest in the poetry of William Blake, was soon buried under more materialistic interests and pleasures. Cambridge seemed to him dark and sinister, and though he read Italian there, and climbed with his tutor the "Seven Storey Mountain" of Dante's *Purgatorio*, he was an unsatisfactory student.

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Throughout this book, Thomas Merton mentions the writers whose thought profoundly influenced his own. Amongst them were Blake; Gerard Manley Hopkins; Aldous Huxley in *Ends and Means*; James Joyce in *Portrait of the Artist*; Maritain and Gilson; and later on, St Augustine and Thomas à Kempis, recommended to him, oddly enough, by the Hindu, Bramachari. Garcia Lorca, the Spanish poet, influenced him too, and in Lorca's memory he wrote:

Where the white bridge rears up its stamping arches
Proud as a colt across the clatter of the shallow river,
The sharp guitars
Have never forgotten your name.

He does not seem to have read the *Centuries of Meditations* by Traherne. But the resemblance between his ideas and those of that earlier Thomas—born also into an age of war, and post-war disillusion—is striking. To both, childhood is a time of natural innocence before the world, the flesh and the devil have super-imposed false standards and false values. "But ah! how many possibilities there were ahead of me," says Merton; "my mind was clean and unformed enough to receive any set of standards, and work with the most perfect of them, and work with Grace itself, and God's own values, if I had ever any chance."

"When the first light which shined in my infancy in its primitive and innocent clarity", wrote Traherne, "was totally eclipsed—if you ask me how it was eclipsed? Truly by the customs and manners of men—finally by the evil influence of a bad education that did not foster and cherish it."

But the minds of mystics in all countries and in all ages, are governed by the same laws and they seek the same object—ultimate union with God, and in God with all created things. All mystics, too, pass through "the dark places of the soul", and all have their moments of exaltation. Thomas Merton even in his unregenerate days had, in Rome, a vision of Owen, his father; and in later years, he saw, like St Augustine, like Henry Vaughan, "Light Unchangeable".

In describing his years of adolescence, he might have used Traherne's words:

Being swallowed up therefore in the miserable grief of idle talk and worthless vanities, thenceforth I lived amongst dreams and shadows, like a prodigal son, feeding upon husks with swine. A formless wilderness full of thorns and troubles the world was, and worse, a waste place covered with idleness and play, and shops, and markets, and taverns. As for churches, they were things I did not understand.

Thomas himself says:

I was stamping the last remains of spiritual vitality out of my own soul, and trying with all my might to crush and obliterate the image of the divine liberty that had been implanted in me by God.

But America was not alien to him like England, and he was more at home in Columbia University than at Cambridge. He arrived in New York a convert to Communism, and found many Communists among his new fellow-students. But Marxism never seems to have become a religion to him, as it does to many. It remained a political belief, and his conclusion is worth quoting:

The weakness of Communism is that it is itself only another breed of the same materialism which is the source of the root of all the evils it so clearly sees.

And so this restless spirit continued to wander through the waste lands, and to snatch at pleasures only to find them deadsea fruit.

Yet, through reading and studying at Columbia University, seeds sown in his mind, and forgotten, germinated, and sprang into the light of consciousness. He remembered the great church at St Antonin, "which had been fitted into the landscape in such a way as to become the keystone of its intelligibility". He turned again to Blake, as a subject for his thesis. Only by reading his autobiography can one follow him through the spiritual adventures which led him at last to find rest in the Roman Catholic Church. It was only after his conversion that he began to write poetry. Yet there were doubts and backslidings until his soul came to anchor in the strictest of orders—the Trappist—and he discovered "the marvellous Joy of Silence". To the Monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemane, upon whose guesthouse these words are written *O beata solitudo—O sola beatudo*, came a friend. He took away with him the MS of Merton's first book of poems which was printed in 1944.

What a waste of a life, some will say, to shut oneself up in a cloister away from the many-coloured world! But this is Thomas Merton's ultimate word:

. . . there is only one vocation, whether you teach or live in the cloister or nurse the sick, whether you are in religion or out of it, married or single, no matter who you are or what you are, you are called to the summit of perfection; you are called to a deep interior life perhaps even to mystical prayer, and you pass the fruits of your contemplation on to others. And if you cannot do so by word, then by example.

DORA WILCOX

VALLEY AND PLAIN

High Valley. By Charmian Clift and George Johnston. (Angus and Robertson, 1949. 12s. 6d.)

I read *High Valley* as I was crossing the Nullarbor Plains. There seemed to be a vast topographical difference between the plains of Australia and the mountains of Tibet; sociologically there seemed to be some points of similarity.

Alternately I read and gazed out of the train window. Each time I glanced back I wondered in what way the award of the first prize of £2000 to this book served the purposes of the *Sydney Morning Herald's Literary Competitions*, which are, I understand, "the encouragement of Australian literature and art".

The book seemed to be an authentic picture of Tibetan life and customs; of that I am not qualified to judge. It could equally be a skilful fabrication. Its story carried me along with the same smooth motion that the Trans bore me from one side of Australia to the other. But whereas the Trans got me somewhere, I am not sure that this book did.

Of the valley: "He was enchanted by the beauty of the high pastures: it was loveliness of a quality he had never known before, because its beauty had the frailty of something one knows to be transient."

The Nullarbor has the monotony of something one feels to be permanent. The train enters it one evening soon after dark. We are still in it when we awake next morning. It remains with us till a little after noon. Mile upon mile

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of it. No easy story on its limestone surface with its sparse covering of blue-bush. But a story deep down somewhere . . .

Of Tibet again: "The world suddenly strode forward into its dimensions. Hills were sharply outlined; contours that had been trembling mirages a few minutes earlier were clear and without intervening space . . . the distant peaks leaned over, white and compelling against the thickening violet of the sky."

No sharp contours on the Nullarbor. All as flat and as monotonous as . . . as Australian literature!

No, surely not that!

Of the people in the Valley: "They were simple but kindly, and they were aroused easily to laughter and hospitality. . . . The people believed that at birth they had reincarnated the spirits of men or women who had lived before, and at their death their spirits would find new abodes in future living things."

Of the aborigines at Ooldea (overheard in the 1st Class Lounge of the Trans): "Oh, the filthy creatures! Look at them! Oh, don't buy anything from them. If you do, make sure you disinfect it. They're simply covered with germs. Your lead, partner. Spades are trumps."

Bacteria, my dear lady! The Tibetans have them, too, it seems. They wash but seldom and never all over the body. It took the stranger from Han to teach one of them how to do that. It sounds so romantic in a book, doesn't it? You've read *High Valley*?

"Oh yes! A charming story. Look at that terrible old woman. The flies on her face! Oh dear, I shall be ill if we stay here much longer!"

Let's hurry back to the Valley. Salom asks: "Can I not belong to the valley and yet still possess what has gone before?"

Muhlam replies: "No. There can be no other allegiance. This is a hard life. It demands all from a man. All—you understand?"

Australia's like that, too. It demands all from a man, all from its writers, and it is even worthy of some consideration when adjudicators of novel competitions decide to award prizes "for the encouragement of Australian literature and art".

I found *High Valley* easy to read and almost as easy to forget. Technically, it's smooth and effortless and no doubt other writers will profit from it in that respect.

But there must be hundreds of valleys high or low in Australia, hundreds of plains large or small, hundreds of situations as romantic and as tragic as the love which grew between Salom and Veshti—the Tibetan girl whom he initiated into the mystic rite of "washing all over the body".

JOHN K. EWERS

GENTLEMEN VERSUS PLAYERS

Literature and Life: Addresses to the English Association. (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, London, 1948. 8s. 6d.)

So much contemporary English literary criticism is merely good talk about authors and books. This is especially true of the lecture or address, as it reaches

us in print. An excellent specimen was Sir Osbert Sitwell's 1947 Presidential Address to the English Association on Meredith. It wove delightfully around its subject, and not till the end did a certain weakness of judgment appear. But in recollection one found it difficult to believe that anything much had been said. The speaker's enthusiasm for Meredith had been conveyed and comparisons adverse to more recent writers had been drawn, but there was no critical elucidation, no line of inquiry had been pursued, and when it came to pronouncement Sir Osbert simply failed, for the passage from *Richard Feverel* which he holds up to admiration does not bear abstraction from its context—indeed the defects of its style become startlingly apparent, in direct contradiction of Sir Osbert's praise. The introduction of Lucy as a "blooming young person" and of Richard as "the Magnetic Youth" scarcely invites appreciation, and the whole passage proves to be an unfortunate illustration of Meredith's style, by no means an example to be set before modern writers. Its quotation, here, was unfair to Meredith, since *Richard Feverel*, his first novel, is far from being his best-written. So that whilst Sir Osbert, by the force of his manner and delivery, might have convinced his audience for the time, cold print exposes the unsoundness of his view.

So carefully have the English cultivated the art of conversation, so little do they affect to be specialists but rather wish to appear as social beings, that it is natural for their literary discussion to be easy and all but informal talking; yet however much one may enjoy it in itself one misses the intellectual satisfaction that an ordered advancement from point to point to an inevitable goal imparts. This can be just as acceptable to a hearer—indeed to a serious auditor who comes to learn is far more valuable. And such, notably, are some of the addresses delivered to the English Association in England, in the new collection, *Literature and Life*. In these, exposition and development of a theme take the place of charming but more or less inconsequential chatter. The reader is not only being intellectually exercised, but also feels that he will arrive somewhere. And to the serious reader, the student of literature, that is most important.

The outstanding example here is Professor V. de Sola Pinto's address "Live Dogs and Dead Lions: A Defence of Modernist Poetry"; closely followed by Mr C. S. Lewis's "Kipling's World". The one, however, is explanation in terms of social change, the other argument to a thesis, which finally may or may not be true. Mr Lewis has a habit of deceiving himself and his readers with his logic, which may seem perfectly reasonable but yet is somewhere false. In "The Problem of Translation" Sir H. Idris Bell makes an earnest attempt to deal with and settle the insoluble, but his preliminary explanation of verse is a superfluous elaboration on the elementary and well known. Thus his contribution forms no good prelude to the volume. Mr G. Rostrevor Hamilton, with the aid of many fresh specimens, discourses entertainingly and illuminatingly on the epigram; Dr H. V. Routh waggishly amuses his audience with personalia rather than argues that "Authors Lead the Same Lives as their Readers"; while, up to the point where his own prejudices and resentments intrude, when he becomes ridiculous, the question "What is Light Verse?" is very wittily and humorously considered by Mr Guy Boas. Mr Lawrence E. Tanner and Mr Reginald W. M. Wright, respectively, contribute valuable historical accounts of "Westminster

Abbey in English Literature" and "The City of Bath and its Literary Associations", the former being the more noteworthy for the addition of new information—some of it of a most unexpected nature. Mr S. C. Roberts provides an appreciation, vitiated as to judgment by friendship, of "Q", and Osbert Lancaster a paper on "England and Greece: a Study of Exchange in the World of Art", which, though it reveals the startling fact that architecturally England reciprocated to Greece, has only Byronic connexion with literature. All in all, *Literature and Life* is a set of addresses showing wide variety of theme and treatment, with some fluctuation of standard. The Central Body of the English Association is to be congratulated on its successful presentation of an aspect of its work in England.

R. G. HOWARTH

PLAIN TALES

Harvest. By John K. Ewers. (Angus and Robertson, 1949. 9s. 6d.)

This collection takes its attractive title from one of the best short stories in the group. With one exception the stories have a limited locale, a country or seaside town, and deal with the minor effects of war on the unimportant people who live there. While the range of the stories is not extensive in theme or types of characters portrayed, yet within this narrow—too narrow—scope the author has created interesting character sketches and told some good yarns. But it is an uneven and even drab collection, conversation, characterization and style tending to combine to leave an unfortunate impression of monotony.

At his best, Mr Ewers has an easy natural style which develops the incidents inevitably. He can tell a good story and displays a sureness of touch and surprising vividness of phrase in a good command of rough bush and town language, as in "Old Clo'es", "Harvest", "Skeets Builds a Shelter", "Where's Loney?", "Hoppy", and "Reserved Occupation".

Not a few good stories have an odd trick of collapsing at the end and falling flat. Perhaps they don't stop soon enough and are not sufficiently well-knit to hang together. Last-paragraph pompous moralizing or underlining and explaining the point blunts the point entirely and is inartistic. And when tragedy is introduced it is exciting for a time and a dramatic tension sustained, but it becomes too matter-of-fact to be stirring and the pitfalls of excessive simplicity and understatement and flatness destroy the effect, as in "The White Dam" and the war stories.

There are some excellent character sketches in the best stories and some of the lesser ones. They ring true and are presented with simplicity and sympathy. But often the characters remain too shadowy to carry the story successfully. The incidents, too, are often so slight as to be negligible, flat and uninspired.

In the presentation of character through limited vocabulary to give the portrayal added realism there are obvious dangers. Mr Ewers does not altogether appear to have avoided these. Barren conversations of yokels with little interest outside their daily tasks is very wearying. But he can and does achieve his effect very well by this method. At best the dialogue is racy, displaying a sure-

ness of touch and feeling for ordinary everyday speech and idiom. It lends itself to a spare, straightforward, simple style, with effective and telling understatement. But "too right it's blooming" monotonous when read again and again and at times it is unconvincing and shows signs of strain. This colloquialism of speech is carried over into his general style and descriptions and gives an impression of always writing in the same key. With this extremely colloquial, matter-of-fact style often goes a poverty of description and flatness of tone. "There isn't any bluer sea anywhere. And there isn't any bluer sky, either. . ." As if to make amends for this aridity there are occasional colourful flashes, which however strike a false note, as in the description of Hilda in "Carew's Place".

Only once does Mr Ewers step outside the province of the very ordinary and everyday and deal with a larger theme. This is the somewhat disastrous last story, "The Crux of the Matter", which has dramatic possibilities in an imaginative theme and delicacy of touch and feeling, but is marred by sentimentality and jingoism.

ELIZABETH ROBERTS

THE ORIGINALITY OF RICKETTY KATE

Mention originality today in any literary discussion and notice how many become defensive. Those who show any interest at all do so as though they were watching for the latest conjuring trick. For the word is now almost a synonym for "cleverness" and exhibitionism. In poetry it is found—particularly among the lesser moderns—in a vocabulary that is rare rather than apt, in allusions that are strenuously modern rather than neatly functional, and wherever writers have substituted novelty for freshness.

Yet true originality springs from simpler, deeper sources. It is inseparable from a great writer's whole outlook, his every perception, his view. Whether he prefers to see things steadily or see them whole, he will surely express his view of them in a manner that is not only different but also distinctive and which will bring a strangeness to familiar things. Strangeness, not obscurity. Just the highly individual expression of the sensitive artist—the surprisingly apt—and the result will give us pause.

One of our minor poets whose work shows a persistent attempt to win this latter originality is Mrs A. J. Filson, who signs her work "R. Kate" or "Ricketty Kate". She sees a fundamental kinship in all things, believing that we are all composed of common elements of which only the measures are different. She believes that to become, momentarily, what one is writing about is the high experience of poetry and that it is through poetry that we can recognize our affinities with the universal. This is not pantheism, for worship of that kind would suggest a certain passivity in the beholder. It is an active rejoicing in the senses and a full appreciation of all experience. At all events, overlooking the philosophical difficulties of this position and realizing that this, or something approaching it, has been the conception of many poets, one finds that "Kate" approaches each of her subjects with a zest and a sweep that augurs well for her expression.

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And her expression seldom fails her. There is always an image, precise, sensuous, and set evocatively in the rhythmic phrase. Writing simply, and with a restrained fervour, of the natural scene, she has an eye for the colour of

cliffs of bronze and amber,
Ebon and purple caverned
When a great cloud passes;

an ear for

The inscrutable word of the wind,
Eloquent upon the hills
And cryptic among the grasses;

and a clear-eyed view of

curved sand strewn
With the ephemeral down
Of wild white birds
Flying wing to wing
Who lead the long way home—

where the cadence is so perfectly controlled and where the choice of a word like "ephemeral" reveals an understanding of the many levels on which words can evoke a response, the pictorial value here being reinforced by the sound of the word itself and an emotional overtone suggesting beauty's transience.

Her imagery is Australian but not belligerently so. She has learnt from the Jindyworobaks without mistaking means for ends as have many of that school. Her mention of the waratah is quite incidental to the effectiveness with which she can speak of its "chiselled fire" and "sculptured flame"; to her, morning comes walking over the waters "galah-breasted", not because it is nationally imperative that it should do so but because it is artistically appropriate. And when, to an obligato of liquid "l" notes and short "i" sounds, she speaks of the

grave eucalypt
Whose unpredictable boughs
Filter the sun and moon
And shoulder stars,

she chooses that tree with an easy naturalness rather than an anxious deliberation.

"Kate" realizes of course that the image, however accurate and functional, is not enough; that there must be imaginative strength. So she can speak of the ecstasy of the storm where one can

see
A million worlds diminished
To ragged drops of rain,

and she can give us glimpses of a time

When the last star floats in ashes
Down to the last abyss
And the dead Sun reels and smashes
Earth's frail edifice,

and with this strength there goes a delicacy that often equals Shaw Neilson at his best, as in "The Victors".

Oh beating
of little silken hammers
towards the light
in the long dark tunnels of the boughs!
Oh mighty contending
of tiny green spears
with earth's brazen shoulder!
Oh dust
on a butterfly's wing!
Oh triumph
of infinitesimal things!
Oh Spring!

Nature in all its aspects sings through her poetry: Nature, Time and Man; Man in his cosmic, elemental setting; Man who cries

Lord, I have felt seas and stars
Stir in my blood,
And all the rivers of the world
In flood!
And I have been myself a part
Of muted snows,
Thunder and rain and every wind
That blows.
And I have known within my flesh
The beat of wings,
And the tumultuous, noiseless rhythms
Of growing things.
And I am all yet none of these—
Chief of Thine inconsistencies.

Throughout the aboriginal legend "Bralgah", where the old myth is presented with vigour and subtlety, throughout most of the "Rhymes and Whimsies" and in "Out of the Dust", the old nature subjects are always seen in strikingly fresh relationships. Thus, she asks of the cicada,

Did some old craftsman long ago
Once pluck a stem of reedy grass
And make a pipe, and softly blow
Your wings like flakes of fairy glass?

Her range also extends to the wittily satiric and it is perhaps by the group of "vegetable rhymes" that she is most popularly known. In each of these she attempts to satirize some trait, wittily, by associating it with the nature of a vegetable and to end by "saving something". Each poem is limited to a few lines which demand exacting discipline in the use of vocabulary and rhyme. The best of them are short neat songs with a laugh—and thought. They range from the light "The Fruitful Vine".

Over my fences and over my shed
The Choko her ample form has spread,
And multitudes of her progeny
Have climbed the boughs of the Lemon Tree.
And as they swing with obvious glee
The Lemon remarks with acidity:
"I hope nobody thinks they belong to me"—

to the deeper "Affinity":

I wonder if the Cabbage knows
He is less lovely than the Rose
Or does he squat in smug content,

A source of noble nourishment;
Or if he pities for her sins
The Rose who has no vitamins;
Or if one thing his great heart knows . . .
That same fire that warms the Rose?

Her sense of humour (which is only another name for a sense of proportion) has been especially valuable to this poet, for it has accompanied a deep personal suffering. It has enabled her to salvage the few profits of pain without paying heavily in bitterness. It is only when one realizes that for the last twenty-three years she has been totally paralysed with rheumatoid arthritis, save for the limited use of one hand, that one can explain her merit; and several other facts, such as her inability to turn a page or move her head, and the necessity to dictate all her poetry, are highly relevant to any critical evaluation of her work. This experience, an experience we can only guess at, has purged away all the inessentials that often clutter a sense of values, and, while the years have given her much time to think, it is obvious from her poetry that they have given her no time to brood.

The great value of all this is that she can write lyrically without any fear of tending towards the pretty, and lyricism at a time when so many are afraid of it is a quality our poetry much needs.

"Ricketty Kate" has listened—and heard. That is why she has tried to "Confirm the mountain. Establish the golden places". And she has written recently of those

Who listening in the pregnant silence heard
Mountains exult. . .
Who sang, though fallen the flower of all desire
Flood-felled from blackened boughs where no birds sing,
Conscious of roots braced beneath the mire
And the tree that blooms beyond the world's last flood or fire.

True, she is only a minor poet, which means that she is not good enough often enough. Those of her poems that, technically faultless and artistically ambitious, rank with the best, are few. It is not a matter of cheap optimism or easy idealism but a matter of writing poetry. "Ricketty Kate" is doing this. She is original in the best, the hard-won, the most truly poetic, sense, and far from being escapist, she would say, with her own "*Realist*".

O this proud fool still runs with wind and cloud
And walks with sun or star for company;
Makes Dusk a gull's wing, Dawn a golden crowd
Of eagles storming earth and sky and sea.
And still in some high hour there seems to be
Beauty beyond all dreaming, so he flings
Small songs across the night of agony,
Songs lit to permanent and lovely things. . .

How quiet moves the moon above the iron wings.

RICHARD WILSON

IN MEMORY

G. W. THATCHER

The Rev. Principal G. W. Thatcher, M.A. (Melb.), M.A. (Oxon.), B.D.

(Edin.), D.D. (Montreal), a Patron of the Sydney Branch of the English Association, died early this year, at the age of 86. Known throughout the world as a great Eastern scholar, Dr Thatcher had been for twenty years Warden of the Camden Theological College, Sydney, and he advised on the institution of the Divinity courses in the University. Many members of the Association will recall his genial chairmanship of its meetings.

WOLFE SEYMOUR FAIRBRIDGE

Wolfe Seymour Fairbridge, who died on 2 May, 1950 at the age of 31, was born in Western Australia, the younger son of Ruby and Kingsley Fairbridge, the Rhodes Scholar, who came to Australia to found the Fairbridge Farm Schools. He was educated at Christ's Hospital, London, and on the continent. In 1938 he returned to Australia where he graduated as Master of Science from the University of Western Australia, specialising in biology. He was granted a travelling studentship which he chose to take out in Sydney. His attention was directed particularly to marine biology which led to his appointment as a Research Officer with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation. He was the representative of U.N.E.S.C.O. at the recent International Fisheries Conference.

As a writer Wolfe Fairbridge had been achieving increasing success, having won second prize in the *Sydney Morning Herald* Poetry Competition of 1948. His work is represented in recent anthologies and in literary periodicals. His most recent writing linked his two interests of biology and literature in a sustained sonnet cycle on the life of Darwin. Those who heard him give a poetry reading on the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the founding of *Southerly* or who have been present at poetry readings in his own home will appreciate the loss sustained by his family and all his friends. A selection from his poetry will be published under the auspices of the Commonwealth Literary Fund.

His last poem, entitled "The Doubt", may appropriately be printed here.

Make room around you for the waste places, for the desert and the flood,
 Turn the inquiring finger in, abjure the blood
 Speeding to its bold promontories.
 Water and sand are verities:
 Hold them in either hand—apart
 Keep the unchanging heart
 Unchanged; the hills, their blooms and hues and chances,
 Enigmas—facets of the one chameleon-tinted God,
 Oh, I myself have known, have trod,
 And many wiser men aver the balm when we have stood
 Abstracted in an abstract whiteness at our pole,
 And known ourselves, and felt our Maker good.
 Study thyself; burn midnight oil;
 Puzzle the ways of stars to men;
 Kiss thou the rod . . . And then—
 Might it even then be, at the last the soul
 Lies with its master under sod?

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor of *Southerly*

Dear Sir,

On page 171 of *Southerly*, No. 3, 1949 you question Mr Green's statement that contemporary Australian literature "lacks strong critical guidance". That may or may not be so, but I feel that critical guidance is needed quite as much by the public as by the writers. Little criticism of value is published by the daily press, and although much excellent work has appeared in *Southerly*, the editor at times must find it difficult to keep up his standard. Possibly it is true that more good poets are born than critics.

I felt this strongly when reading Mr H. L. McLoskey's review of Colin Roderick's *In Mortal Bondage* in the same issue. He tells us that the book is "fascinating in its interest" and that it is "the first of its kind, the exemplar of a new species—the complete and scholarly literary biography . . . the result of a long and patient study of masses of biographical material". Note the word "scholarly". May a book be called so that gives no description of the "literary remains" of Mrs Praed made available by the relatives, that gives no information about other sources that may have been examined, and that reports long and animated conversations between a variety of people without any hint of sources for them? If they were found among Mrs Praed's papers, the author should have said so, and some information should have been given as to how much they had been edited. May a book be called scholarly that has no index and provides no bibliography?

Generally one feels that not enough is made of Mrs Praed's twenty-eight years' friendship with Justin McCarthy, and too much importance is given to the connexion with Nancy Harward, though no doubt the latter strongly influenced Mrs Praed in her declining years. The whole of the episode is treated as though Theosophy and Spiritualism are generally accepted. That is by no means the case.

No real attempt is made to show Mrs Praed's position among the novelists of her period. That she published some forty novels shows that she had a public, and Mr Roderick tells us she was "widely read". He more than once applies to her work that dangerous word "genius", he speaks of the treatment of one of her novels as securing her "a niche among the immortals of English literature", but he does not really discuss her place in English or Australian literature, or why, while novelists of the calibre of Mrs Lynn Linton and "Ouida" are given places in such a standard work as the *Cambridge History of English Literature* Mrs Praed's name does not appear in it. The discussion of her novels in the last chapter is scarcely adequate.

Mr Roderick's book is often interesting and you feel that he is capable of doing much better work. But Mr McLoskey's over-praise is not helpful either to the author or the reader.

PERCIVAL SERLE

Mr McLoskey replies:

Mr Percival Serle criticizes my review of *In Mortal Bondage* on two main grounds:

(1) that the book is not scholarly, as I claim it to be; and (2) that there is no critical assessment of Mrs Praed's position in the literature of the novel. I shall deal with these criticisms in turn.

As to the first ground, Mr Serle complains that the book does not contain detailed information of the biographical material. But surely the things Mr Serle demands are purely the footnotes of scholarship. *In Mortal Bondage* is biography in the more popular and readable method of today, but it is none the less the fruit of scholarship and scholarly research, of long study and diligent reading, of masterly handling and compression of material. Mr Serle adds, may a book be called scholarly that has no index and provides no bibliography? Surely these are strange criteria of scholarship he seeks here. Would he say, to take only two examples, that Gissing's *The Immortal Dickens* or Dowden's *Shakespeare—His Mind and Art* are not scholarly? They certainly have no bibliography or index. Also the author is seldom the maker of his index. As to bibliography—I daresay that we, in our charity, can excuse Mr Serle for exhibiting his own particular hobby-horse.

On the second point, I remind Mr Serle that this is a biography and not a thesis or dissertation. No doubt Mr Roderick would have been glad to make his work fuller, and to deal at greater length with the critical aspects had the conditions of modern publication made that possible.

As to the implications of Mr Serle's opening paragraph, I feel that they are very shakily supported. Mr Serle does right to have his own opinions, but wrong to impute a lack of critical faculty to those who differ from him. After all, not only Mr Roderick's book, but my review of it also, were written in the light of much fuller information of Mrs Praed and her work than Mr Serle could possibly have had.

Finally, I would ask Mr Serle to read my review again—carefully. He will find that I do criticize a few things in Mr Roderick's book adversely, but in a spirit of helpfulness.

[A chronological list of Mrs Praed's writings would have been helpful for reference. Perhaps Mr Roderick will supply it in any further edition—Editor.]

NOTES AND COMMENTS

"Poetry Commonwealth"—Number Two of this quarterly (edited by Lionel Monteith) contains reprinted poems by Judith Wright and a review by Howard Sergeant of *Australian Poetry, 1945* (edited by Kenneth Slessor). Number Three is a South African issue, edited by Roy Macnab as a guest. Reviews by Sergeant of Francis Webb's *A Drum for Ben Boyd*, E. G. Moll's *The Waterhole*, and Judith Wright's *The Moving Image* are included. Number Four, besides containing a poem by the Australian David Campbell, is notable for an article on "Australian Poetry Today" by T. Inglis Moore. "What is Australian poetry like?

Where is it going? How far is it distinctively Australian? How good is it as poetry?" are the questions that Moore sets out to answer for readers throughout the British Commonwealth. He lays stress on the youthfulness, vitality and affirmativeness of our poetry, which he views as qualities of the people, though more plausibly they are to be related—at least as illustrated by FitzGerald and himself—to the immense influence of Norman Lindsay and Hugh McCrae on the younger poets in the mid-twenties; and pessimism, which is powerfully represented by Slessor, A. D. Hope, James McAuley, John Quinn and S. Musgrave, is overlooked. In subject-matter Moore distinguishes four trends: a strong national consciousness, a natural use of the Australian environment, idiom, and imagery, an interest in the national history, and criticism of Australian society; in form an expansion into narrative and dramatic poetry and satire. Even so, our poetry "is still immature in that it has not, as a national form of expression, evolved an *Australian style*". "On the whole, Australian literature is probably richer than that of any other Dominion", and it has produced four younger poets, namely FitzGerald, Slessor, Douglas Stewart and Judith Wright, "whose best work can stand honourably alongside that of leading English contemporary poets".

Number Five (in a larger format) contains one poem each by Judith Wright and FitzGerald, with a review by Sergeant of *Australian Poetry, 1947*, Rosemary Dobson's *The Ship of Ice* and Val Vallis's *Songs of the East Coast*. The editorial notes that "Commonwealth literature is gaining ground in the United Kingdom. In the last year it has received more notice in this country than ever before". Number Six contains a poem by David Campbell, a short essay on "Folklore in Australian Poetry" by Peter Hopgood and a review by Sergeant of Hopgood's *Circus at World's End*, R. G. H.'s *Spright and Geist* and *Involuntaries*, and David Campbell's *Speak with the Sun*.

A. J. A. Waldock Memorial—A Memorial to the late Professor A. J. A. Waldock, to take the form of a library of American Literature, the academic study of which he instituted in this country in 1940, is planned. Details will be announced later.

Australian Biography—A Dictionary of Australian Biography in two volumes, by Percival Serle, parallel to the English *Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, was published by Angus and Robertson in 1949. It contains 1030 biographies, whose subjects were dead before the end of 1942 (thus Baylebridge is included, but not William Hay, who died in 1944). There are 137 literary men and women, "all of established reputation, or who had been highly popular, or represented in the best anthologies", 76 scholars, philosophers and clergymen. The number of writers is exceeded only by the number of politicians (174), pioneers, explorers, pastoralists and men of business (140). Artists, including architects, actors and musicians, come next (130). There are altogether 42 women. The work is not fully up to its date of publication: thus neither Furphy's *Buln-Buln and the Brolga*, published in 1948, nor his short stories, are mentioned, as published or unpublished. A summary judgment, usually kindly, rounds off each article. The choice of writers for inclusion is affected by a certain perhaps unconscious Melbourne bias: thus

Lesbia Harford (Melbourne) appears, while J. A. R. Mackellar (Sydney) is absent. The article on Brennan suffers from lack of first-hand information (such as gives additional value to the Baylebridge article) and a moral overemphasis, with insufficient appreciation of Brennan's great achievement. Some faults, however, are inevitable in a large project carried out by a single hand working against time. Mr Serle has performed a great service to Australia, and it seems certain that his volumes will take their place as a standard authority (known, like the D. N. B., as D. A. B.).

The British Annual of Literature, 1949—The latest number of this valuable production, edited by Edith M. Fry, devotes special attention, in the Editorial and several articles, to the English Association in England, Australia, South Africa, Egypt and India. "The English Association holds a unique position, as the rallying-point for scholars and writers all over the world who are interested in the study of English." Another article of interest to us is Norman Bartlett's "Pioneers of a New World Literature", in which contemporary Australian writing is surveyed and the author looks forward to the time when Australia "will become a literary capital instead of a literary suburb".

Nobel Prize—The Western Australian novelist and short-story writer Katharine Susannah Prichard has been nominated by the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Perth for the Nobel Prize in Literature. This nomination is supported by Professors of English in the Universities and other prominent people interested in Australian Literature.

Contemporary Australian Poets—Mr Arthur Murphy (himself a poet), of Mildura, Victoria, has in the press a volume of essays on a number of contemporaries.

Poetry Competition—Prizes in the Queensland Authors' and Artists' Association's Lyric Poem Competition for 1949 were awarded, for the Senior section to Miss Gwen Corrie of East Kew, Victoria, and for the Junior section to Glenys Smallwood of Tambar Springs, N.S.W.

Furphy—Information as to the present whereabouts of two stories by Joseph Furphy, which are missing and are required for the collection in preparation, is sought. Their titles are "The Box of Pandora" and "An Idyll of the Wimmera". Grateful acknowledgement will be made by R. G. Howarth, Department of English, the University, Sydney.

Notable Birthday Anniversaries—Dame Mary Gilmore was 85 on 16 August, Hugh McCrae will be 74 on 4 October, this year. Dame Mary's address is 2 "Claremont", 99 Darlinghurst Road, King's Cross, Sydney, Mr McCrae's "Anne Field", River Road, Camden, N.S.W.

Australian Literature—The Commonwealth Literary Fund Lectures on Australian Literature, at the University this year, are being delivered by Mr H. M. Green, B.A., LL.B., Former Librarian of the Fisher Library. Mr Green is giving a series of nine lectures on *The Poetry of Affirmation*, and one lecture on the Commonwealth War Historian of the First World War, Dr C. E. W. Bean. The subjects of the course are as follows: 1. T. S. Eliot and the situation on which his poetry is based. 2. The Bush Balladists: A. B. Paterson and E. J.

SOUTHERLY

Brady. 3. Hugh McCrae, and Brennan's "The Wanderer". 4 and 5. Bernard O'Dowd. 6, 7 and 8. R. D. Fitzgerald. 9. Leonard Mann and Douglas Stewart. 10. C. E. W. Bean—A Neglected Historian.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

- Portrait in Youth of Sir John Longstaff (1861-1941)*, by Nina Murdoch. (Angus & Robertson Ltd, 1948. 15s.)
- The Buln-Buln and the Brolga*, by "Tom Collins" (Joseph Furphy), edited with a foreword by R. G. Howarth. (Angus & Robertson Ltd, 1948. 7s. 6d.)
- The Aunt's Story: A Novel*, by Patrick White. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948; Angus & Robertson, 12s. 3d.)
- Get What You Want*, by F. W. Marsh. (Angus & Robertson Ltd, 1948. 7s. 6d.)
- Warrigal the Warrior*, by C. K. Thomson. (Dymock's Book Arcade Ltd, 1948. 5s.)
- Just William's Luck*, by Richmal Crompton. (George Newnes Ltd, London; Dymock's Book Arcade Ltd, 1948.)
- Architecture in England*, by John Summerson; *Drama Since 1939*, by Robert Speaight; *Music Since 1939*, by Rollo H. Myers; *Painting Since 1939*, by Robin Ironside. (The Arts in Britain, published for the British Council by Longmans Green and Co., London, 1946-7. 2s. each.) *Discussion*, by Janet Adam Smith (Aspects of Britain, 1947. 1s.)
- Sense, Feeling and Thought: New Roads to Composition*, by Frank Mosby and J. Kirkby Thomas. (Oxford University Press, London, Melbourne, 1948. 6s.)
- Stepping Stones to the South Pole*, by J. R. Nichol. (Angus & Robertson, 1948. 15s.)
- Stone of Destiny*, by Ion L. Idriess. (Angus & Robertson, 1948. 10s. 6d.)
- In Mortal Bondage: The Strange Life of Rosa Praed*, by Colin Roderick. (Angus & Robertson, 1948. 12s. 6d.)
- Wild Colonial Boys*, by Frank Clune. (Angus & Robertson, 1948. 21s.)
- Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, by Vance Palmer. (Georgian House, Melbourne, 1948. 21s.)
- Landfall: A New Zealand Quarterly*, edited by Charles Brasch, Number 8, December 1948. (The Caxton Press, Christchurch. 5s.)
- Whither Jennifer? A Story of Adventure*, by Gladys Lister. (Angus & Robertson, 1948. 7s. 6d.)
- The Pixie O'Harris Story Book*, illustrated by the author, new and revised edition. (Angus & Robertson, 1948. 12s. 6d.)
- Battle-Song of Change: A Poem of Challenge*, by "The Red Bard". (Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1948.)
- Involuntaries*, by R. G. H. (Angus & Robertson, 1948. 7s. 6d.)
- Poems*, by Elizabeth Riddell, designed and decorated by Douglas Annand. (A Ure Smith Publication, Sydney, 1948. 42s.)
- Arena Quarterly of New Zealand Writing*, edited by N. F. Hoggard, Numbers 18 and 19 (Wellington, 1948. 1s. each.)

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